

## Les Chrétiens du Comté de Tripoli: Un modèle de tolérance?

Nada HÉLOU

Le présent papier s'attache à mettre en lumière quelques aspects parfois méconnus dans les relations et dans les perceptions intercommunautaires chrétiennes, et ce au sein du comté de Tripoli où prévalait de fait un contexte religieux multiconfessionnel doublé d'un substrat de *melting-pot* socio-culturel. Après un bref aperçu des différentes églises et communautés actives dans cette circonscription administrative, l'objet de notre étude sera abordé grâce au croisement d'un éventail de sources dont nous disposons, à savoir les témoignages écrits de la période en question ainsi que les vestiges de surface d'art et d'architecture.

Le comté de Tripoli, fondé en 1109 par Raymond de Saint Gilles, comte de Toulouse, formait comme une sorte de mosaïque socio-confessionnelle qui regroupait en son sein différentes communautés: on y rencontrait parallèlement aux chrétiens occidentaux, des maronites, des grecs orthodoxes appelés melkites, des syriaques jacobites ou miaphysites, des nestoriens, des arméniens et d'autres minorités, sans pour autant oublier les musulmans<sup>1</sup>. On sait que l'Eglise latine possédait un siège épiscopal dans la ville de Tripoli<sup>2</sup>, tout comme les nestoriens qui y avaient un évêché<sup>3</sup>. Les Melkites y détenaient un diocèse<sup>4</sup>. Le chroniqueur Grégoire Bar Hebraeus (1226-1286)<sup>5</sup> mentionne un évêque jacobite à Tripoli en 1252<sup>6</sup>. Les arméniens étaient minoritaires. Quant aux maronites, bien qu'ils ne possédassent pas leur propre prélat à Tripoli, ils constituaient la plus grande communauté au sein du Mont Liban<sup>7</sup>.

Dans ce mélange social ou multiconfessionnel l'on se demande quelles étaient les relations qui pouvaient rattacher ou non ces différentes communautés. Le problème sera abordé d'une façon indirecte c'est-à-dire à travers des témoignages historiques quelque peu équivoques que nous allons tenter de comprendre, comme nous allons avoir recours aux peintures murales en tant que témoignage matériel qui devrait élucider les rapports existants entre ces communautés.

### LES RELATIONS INTERCOMMUNAUTAIRES

#### *Entre Latins et Orientaux*

Les opinions des historiens tant arabes qu'occidentaux envers les relations qui pouvaient exister entre ces communautés sont très divergentes. Pour les historiens maronites la bonne relation menant à l'union avec l'Eglise catholique s'est établie dès le début du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle<sup>8</sup>. Beaucoup d'encre a été versée sur ce sujet c'est pourquoi je me limite à énoncer quelques incidents relatés par les deux plus anciens historiens

<sup>1</sup> Olmo 2010, 156-168, esp. 157; Rey 1883, 75-104.

<sup>2</sup> Les croisés, dès la fondation de leurs états en terre d'Orient ont remplacé toute la hiérarchie supérieure de l'Eglise melkite par des patriarches et évêques latins. Cf. Hamilton 1980, 18-51.

<sup>3</sup> Richard 1945, 86.

<sup>4</sup> Malgré la suppression par les latins des sièges épiscopaux melkites, ceux-ci s'arrangeaient selon l'expression d'Olivia Olmo "(...) par un moyen détourné, de réoccuper, aux côtés des Francs, leurs diocèses (Tortose, Tripoli, Gibelet et Raphanée)". Ainsi le diocèse de Tripoli groupait les évêchés de Tripoli, Batroun, Arcas et Artésie. C'était une sorte de compromis établi entre les deux parties. Cf. Olmo 2010, 156-168, esp. 160.

<sup>5</sup> Hamilton 1980, 347; Weltecke 2006, 95-124.

<sup>6</sup> Des syriaques jacobites venus de Mossoul en 961 se seraient réfugiés à Tripoli où ils auraient bâti une église dédiée à Mar Behnam. Cette même église sera mentionnée trois siècles plus tard par Bar Hebraeus (Budge 1932, 167). Pour la présence syrienne orthodoxe dans la région de Tripoli, voir Immerzeel 2009, 78-82.

<sup>7</sup> Hoteit 2010, 45-56; Kattar 2010, 31-44; Richard 1945, 61.

<sup>8</sup> Ibn Al-Qila'i et Stephane Doueihy ont centré leur attention sur l'ancienneté de la relation des maronites avec les latins qui, d'après eux, s'est tissée dès les premières années du passage des latins à travers le littoral libanais. Cf. al-Anaissi 1911, 1-6; Ibn Al-Qila'i, *Madiha*, du manuscrit de Bkerkino 13; Harfouch 1931, 25-28 et Tawtel 1951, 11. Sur l'historiographie de la relation des Maronites avec l'Occident voir Kattar 2010, 31-44. Voir aussi: Kattar 2008, 383-375. Kamal Salibi Ibn al-Qila'i dans sa *Madiha* ne fait pas de distinction entre croisés et maronites. Cf. Salibi 1959, 69.

des maronites Ibn-al-Qila'i (1450-1516) puis Stephan Doueihy (1630-1704). D'après ces auteurs le missionnaire du pape avait offert en 1100 au patriarche maronite, Youssef al-Jirjisi († 1120), la mitre et la crosse en signe de bonne entente entre les deux Églises<sup>9</sup>. D'après Doueihy l'envoyé du pape, le cardinal Guillaume, s'est réuni à Tripoli en 1131 avec le patriarche maronite Grégoire de Halat et nombre de ses prélats où ils ont signé un document attestant "leur obéissance au pape"<sup>10</sup>. Plus tard en 1215 le patriarche Aramia el'Amchiti fut convoqué à Rome pour assister au concile du Latran où il resta trois mois<sup>11</sup>. Les historiens latins, eux, avaient une perception plutôt apaisée, bien qu'outrecuidante, vis-à-vis des maronites. Guillaume de Tyr affirme qu'en 1182 les maronites "revenant à eux-mêmes et renonçant au mal..." déclarent leur union à l'Église romaine<sup>12</sup>.

Pour les historiens orthodoxes aucune entente n'a pu avoir lieu du moment où leurs patriarches et évêques ont été remplacés par des prélats occidentaux<sup>13</sup>. Certes les latins ont supplanté le haut clergé orthodoxe, mais leur mainmise fut moins perceptible dans les églises et monastères des régions rurales où la communauté a continué de pratiquer ses rites religieux en toute liberté<sup>14</sup>. Les syriaques jacobites, qui sont minoritaires à cette époque dans le comté de Tripoli, y possédait néanmoins un siège épiscopal<sup>15</sup>; ils ont conservé un état d'esprit plutôt positif à l'égard des latins<sup>16</sup> et probablement à l'égard de leurs concitoyens.

Certes des disputes ou des malentendus pouvaient survenir et perturber les relations entre deux communautés, mais les conflits pouvaient tout autant

se déclencher au sein d'un même groupe ethnique ou communautaire. Non seulement des discordes pouvaient parfois dégénérer en guerre entre les seigneurs francs pour le partage du pouvoir ou de terres, mais parfois ceux-ci recouraient à des princes musulmans pour leur venir en aide contre le compatriote franc. Citons à titre d'exemple le conflit qui eut lieu en 1108 entre Tancrède, seigneur d'Antioche et Josselin, seigneur de Turbessel (comté d'Edesse) et futur comte d'Edesse afin que celui-ci recouvre sa seigneurie après sa captivité. Chacun des deux seigneurs demanda l'aide d'un prince musulman<sup>17</sup>. L'on sait de même que l'Église maronite était, par moments, divisée: il y avait des adeptes à l'union avec Rome, mais aussi des opposants à cette union. Ainsi en 1282 le siège patriarcal maronite était pris de force par Luqa de Bnahrn mais aussi, en cette même année, Irimiya de Dmalsa fut élu chef de l'Église maronite en la présence du prince de Jbeil<sup>18</sup>. Après 1283 on n'entendra plus parler de Luqa de Bnahrn qui a été probablement mis à mort par les soldats de Qalaoun<sup>19</sup>.

Il est évident que ces communautés chrétiennes étaient les sujets des latins qui formaient la classe dirigeante. C'est pourquoi ils devaient se ranger sous l'autorité de ceux-ci. Le témoignage de Jacques de Vitry évoquant les chrétiens de Syrie est édifiant en ce point quand il soutient que les "indigènes" subissaient "le joug de la servitude sous divers patrons" et qu'ils étaient "destinés par leurs seigneurs à exercer l'agriculture"<sup>20</sup>. On peut alors en supposer que la posture d'obéissance et de soumission de toutes ces communautés chrétiennes les réunissait ou du moins les mettait dans une même condition. De ce fait il devient difficile de soutenir l'hypothèse de relations conflictuelles de ces différents sujets entre eux.

C'est ainsi que l'auteur des colonies franques en Syrie, E. Rey, affirme que "les historiens arabes reconnaissaient eux-mêmes que les populations chrétiennes et musulmanes, quelle que fût leur origine, vivaient en bonne intelligence dans toute l'étendue des principautés franques"<sup>21</sup>. Un autre témoignage, d'époque cette fois, assez explicite, nous est donné par Michel le Syrien qui dit: "(...) les Francs, qui, à cette époque, occupaient les places de la Palestine, et aussi de la Syrie, et qui avaient des pontifes dans leurs églises, ne soulevaient jamais de difficultés au sujet de la foi, ni pour arriver à une seule formule dans tous les peuples et dans toutes les langues des chrétiens; mais ils considéraient

<sup>9</sup> Tawtel 1951, 11.

<sup>10</sup> Tawtel 1951, 38.

<sup>11</sup> Tawtel 1951, 102.

<sup>12</sup> Guillaume de Tyr 1992, 391.

<sup>13</sup> Des auteurs contemporains voir: Hoteit 2010, 52, ou encore Firizli 2002, 555-578.

<sup>14</sup> Balard 2017, 93; Hamilton 1980, 87.

<sup>15</sup> Fiey 1993, 167.

<sup>16</sup> Il est intéressant de noter ici l'incident avec le Maphrien Saliba qui, avant de mourir à Tripoli, légua une grande part de ses biens à l'Église latine. Cf. Fiey 1997, 89-99; Immerzeel 2009, 79 et n. 12.

<sup>17</sup> Ibn al-Fourat, Tarikh ad-douwal, cité par Balard 2017, 94.

<sup>18</sup> Baroudi 1998, 269-274; Salibi 1959, 61; Kattar 2008, 291-292.

<sup>19</sup> Salibi 1959, 63.

<sup>20</sup> De Sandoli 1983, 46, charte no 3039.

<sup>21</sup> Rey 1883, 96.

comme chrétien quiconque adorait la croix, sans enquête ni examen”<sup>22</sup>. D’ailleurs les francs traitaient tous leurs sujets de la même manière et étaient tous considérés des non-francs<sup>23</sup>.

### *Entre chrétiens locaux d’après les témoignages écrits*

Les témoignages dont nous disposons sur les interactions sont ténus. Ils nous permettent néanmoins d’en dégager quelques pistes de réflexions.

#### *1. Les notices syriaques dans un contexte maronite*

Il existe des témoignages historiques forts singuliers concernant l’appartenance de certaines églises à l’une ou l’autre communauté. Ainsi Philippe de Tarazi mentionne un manuscrit syriaque dans lequel le Maphrien Ignace IV Saliba (1253-1258) a noté de sa propre main la liste des noms des prêtres qu’il a ordonné à l’église de Saint Behnam à Tripoli<sup>24</sup>. De là ceux-ci étaient envoyés dans différents évêchés. Le manuscrit est conservé actuellement au monastère de Cherfeh (au-dessus de Harissa)<sup>25</sup>. Parmi ces noms, une note nous informe que le diacre Behnam fut ordonné en 1256 et qu’il servirait à l’église de Behdidat près de Jbeil. À la lumière de ce témoignage les chercheurs se sont accordés pour attribuer l’église et le village de Behdidat à la communauté syriaque, alors que celui-ci est connu pour être maronite<sup>26</sup>. De plus la région de Jbeil a toujours été mentionnée dans les références latines comme peuplée par les maronites<sup>27</sup>.

Les références maronites, bien que tardives, évoquent, elles aussi, Jbeil et ses hauteurs comme étant habités par les maronites<sup>28</sup>. Plusieurs questions se posent alors : comment un diacre syriaque jacobite pouvait-il servir dans une église maronite ? Est-ce que le village de Behdidat était peuplé par des syriaques jacobites dans une région connue pour être maronite ? Ou est-ce l’église de Saint-Théodore appartenait aux syriaques jacobites dans un village maronite ?

La plupart des auteurs qui ont étudié les fresques de l’église de Behdidat se sont tous basés sur cette inscription pour attribuer l’église et, éventuellement ses peintures, aux syriaques jacobites<sup>29</sup>. Mat Immerzeel en l’occurrence, reste sceptique à l’égard de cette déduction. Dans son ouvrage *Identity Puzzles* traitant de l’art des communautés chrétiennes d’Orient, et étudiant la complexité de cette situation, l’auteur suggère que les Latins et les maronites

auraient permis aux émigrés syriaques qui étaient arrivés à Tripoli suite aux incursions des mongols en Syrie et aussi aux troubles intérieurs qui divisaient la communauté syriaque, de venir habiter dans des villages maronites tels Behdidat. Ne disposant pas d’église à Behdidat les syriaques jacobites auraient utilisé celle des maronites pour célébrer l’office liturgique (ceci se produit aussi à l’époque actuelle). Cela souligne de la même manière la tolérance entre les différentes communautés chrétiennes. Cette conjecture serait, à mon avis, la plus plausible<sup>30</sup>.

Elle est corroborée par une autre note écrite dans un manuscrit syriaque orthodoxe (Florence, Bibliotheca Laurenziana, inv. no. 2) et datée de 1580 des Grecs soit 1268/1269 ap. J.C. Celle-ci mentionne un certain Barsaume fils du prêtre Klimus et ses frères Slayman et Philippus comme responsables de l’église des Saints-Basile et Nohra du village de Smar Jbeil dans le Batroun<sup>31</sup>. Barsaume est un nom exclusivement syriaque. Cette église médiévale de plan basilical mais quasi carré existe encore dans le village de Smar Jbeil. Un fragment de fresques a été dernièrement découvert, faisant remonter l’église au Moyen Âge et, probablement au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle<sup>32</sup>. Cette région – Batroun et ses hauteurs –, est connue pour

<sup>22</sup> Kiraz *et al.* 2011, 222; Youssif 2006, 75.

<sup>23</sup> Balard 2017, 115.

<sup>24</sup> De Tarazi 1948, 162-163.

<sup>25</sup> Le manuscrit a été amené ici au début du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle par un prêtre venu de Mossoul. Voir Immerzeel 2009, 80-81.

<sup>26</sup> De Tarazi 1948, 162-163.

<sup>27</sup> Voir Jacques De Vitry (Guizot 1825, 156); Guillaume de Tyr 1992, I, 390-391.

<sup>28</sup> Que ce soit Ibn-al-Qila’i (1450-1516) ou Stéphane Doueihî (1630-1704), les deux premiers historiens des maronites évoquent les régions de Jbeil et Batroun comme étant peuplées uniquement par des maronites. D’ailleurs la plupart des patriarches du XII<sup>e</sup>-XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle étaient originaires de ces régions.

<sup>29</sup> Baroudi 1994, 152-163; Badwi 2000, 66; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 20; Hunt 2009, 274-275. Mahmoud Zibawi n’évoque pas cette note. Cf. Zibawi 2009, 30-37.

<sup>30</sup> Immerzeel 2009, 80.

<sup>31</sup> Immerzeel 2009, 81; Baroudi 1994, 152-163, esp. 158.

<sup>32</sup> Hormis les peintures de l’église de Mar Saba à Eddé Batroun datées de la fin du XII<sup>e</sup>-début du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, l’écrasante majorité des fresques décorant les églises du Liban remonte au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. C’est pourquoi le petit fragment de peinture apparu dans le sondage effectué par le regretté Vladimir Sarabianov dans l’annexe sud de l’église de Mar Nohra devrait remonter au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, mais tant que la peinture n’est pas encore dégagée ces déductions restent hypothétiques.

avoir abrité depuis le Moyen Âge les maronites<sup>33</sup>. De ce fait se crée, une situation assez équivoque. Mais vu la prééminence de l'élément maronite dans la région à l'époque il devient difficile de concevoir une présence syriaque jacobite ou tout autre<sup>34</sup>. Ici aussi Immerzeel tranche sur la question en disant: "The Christians who lived here were Maronites, and therefore these buildings must have been Maronite as well, as they still are today"<sup>35</sup>.

## 2. Les notices maronites et melkites

Par ailleurs le monastère de Notre-Dame-de-Kaftoun, actuellement d'appartenance grecque orthodoxe, était, d'après les témoignages écrits du XII<sup>e</sup> et XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles, aux mains de moines maronites<sup>36</sup>. Ainsi son nom apparaît pour la première fois en 1140/41 sur les marges du manuscrit syriaque de Jacques de Saroug qui est daté du X<sup>e</sup>-XI<sup>e</sup> siècle (ms. CXVIII fol. 252 de la Bibliothèque Vaticane). Nous reproduisons littéralement la notice en marge du texte qui est écrite en *karshouni*: "Le 10 du mois béni de juillet de l'an 1452 des Grecs (1140/41 de l'ère chrétienne), le fils Daniel, moine du monastère de Kaftoun, vint chez moi, Pierre, patriarche des

Maronites, assis sur le siège d'Antioche sous le nom de Jacob, originaire du village de Ramat dans le district de Batroun. Je lui communiquais le pouvoir de Dieu et de ma bassesse en le nommant supérieur et administrateur du monastère de saint Jean de Kouzbanda en l'île de Chypre..."<sup>37</sup>. Cette notice indique non seulement que le monastère de Kaftoun était géré en 1140 par les maronites mais aussi que le monastère de Saint-Jean de 'Kouzbanda' à Chypre appartenait lui aussi à l'Église maronite. Nous y reviendrons plus loin.

Une autre notice écrite par Irimiya ad-Dmalsawi et datée du 9 février 1279 a été retrouvée par Tubiya al-'Anaysi dans un évangile syriaque de la Bibliothèque Médicis à Florence. Il s'agit de l'ordination de celui-ci archevêque au couvent de Kaftoun (Irimiya ad-Damalsawi qui sera patriarche de 1282 à 1297)<sup>38</sup>. Ceci témoigne, une fois de plus, de l'appartenance maronite du monastère encore à cette époque.

Par ailleurs une évocation du monastère de Kaftoun, remontant à 1256, se retrouve cette fois, dans un manuscrit syriaque melkite (ms. de la Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris no.134). Il s'agit ici d'un ménée du mois de novembre écrit dans "le couvent de la Mère de Dieu de Nahr Kaftoun par un de ses moines en 1256 du temps de Siméon, évêque de Batroun et du prêtre Siméon, supérieur du couvent"<sup>39</sup>. L'on comprend alors qu'en 1256 le monastère était aux mains de la communauté melkite, sans pour autant signaler un changement de propriétaire ou tout autre modification qui se serait survenue. L'idée qui se crée est celle d'une continuité ininterrompue de ses propriétaires.

Toujours au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, encore dans un manuscrit syriaque melkite du British Museum (ms. CCCCVIII, colophon, fol. 242), il est évoqué que cet ouvrage a été exécuté "à l'époque du père Siméon, premier supérieur du monastère" de Kaftoun, et ceci en 1595 de l'ère grecque ce qui équivaut à 1283/84 de l'ère chrétienne. Peu avant cette date, de 1279 à 1282, Irimiya ad-Dmalsawi détenait ce siège avant de devenir patriarche des maronites.

La situation qui se crée ne facilite guère nos tentatives de comprendre qui étaient les propriétaires du monastère. Ainsi en 1256 le monastère était melkite, mais de 1279 à 1282 il est aux mains des maronites, alors qu'en 1283, probablement un an après, il est tenu par les melkites. L'on aurait pu supposer que les deux communautés vivaient chacune dans son propre couvent, dédiés tous les deux à la Vierge. Certes deux monastères se côtoient à

<sup>33</sup> Les références rapportant l'arrière-pays de Batroun aux maronites sont multiples. Je me limite à ne citer que deux. Ernest Renan affirme l'ancienne appartenance maronite de Smar Jbeil. Ainsi l'auteur de la Mission de Phénicie dit "C'est un beau village mardaïte et l'un des centres de la lutte énergique que les maronites soutinrent, au du Moyen Âge, contre les empereurs de Constantinople et les musulmans". Cf. Khalifé 2003, 76; Renan 1864, 244.

<sup>34</sup> Des églises servant de lieux de culte pour deux communautés étaient une tradition assez courante dans l'orient chrétien. Citons en guise d'exemple l'église du Saint-Sépulcre dans laquelle l'office a lieu entre trois communautés: Melkite orthodoxe, Latine et Arménienne. La même situation s'opère en Égypte en y incluant les coptes. Plus tard Saydnaya marquera le service de différentes communautés, entre autres les maronites qui avaient un autel propre à eux. Cette remarque m'a été suggérée par Mat Immerzeel que je remercie vivement. Cf. l'article d'Immerzeel dans ce volume.

<sup>35</sup> Immerzeel 2009, 82.

<sup>36</sup> Hérou 2007a, 292-311; Waliszewski/Chmielewski *et al.* 2013, 291-322, esp. 294-296; Zibawi 2009, 68-72.

<sup>37</sup> Cette traduction a été prise du manuscrit de Georges Borgi qui a rassemblé les documents concernant le monastère de Kaftoun mais qui est décédé avant de pouvoir les publier. Voir aussi: Jabre Mouawad 2001-2002, 95-113; Hérou 2003b, 101-131, esp. 128; *eadem* 2007a, 295.

<sup>38</sup> Salibi 1959, 60.

<sup>39</sup> Jabre Mouawad 2001-2002, 95-113; Hérou 2007a, 292-311.



Kaftoun: l'un pouvait être occupé par les moines maronites, alors que l'autre, appartenait aux melkites. Or l'un des deux monastères était dédié aux saints Serges et Bacchus et non à la Vierge comme les susmentionnés témoignages l'évoquent clairement<sup>40</sup>. Cette hypothèse une fois déclinée, il s'avère qu'au cours de la deuxième moitié du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle il y avait une alternance de supérieurs, maronites et melkites, sur le couvent de la Vierge à Kaftoun.

Les deux dernières notices, celle du ménée de la Bibliothèque de Paris, et celle du manuscrit du Musée britannique, nous laissent déduire que le monastère de Kaftoun était, à partir du milieu du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, melkite. Reste à supposer que "Siméon, premier supérieur du monastère" en 1283/84, était le premier responsable orthodoxe qui occupait ce siège ici. C'est probablement ce même Siméon qui était mentionné une trentaine d'années auparavant et qui était déjà le supérieur du monastère. L'on peut alors prétendre que Syméon a détenu la fonction de supérieur du monastère en 1256, puis il aurait été destitué pour léguer provisoirement cette place à Irimiya. De ce fait Syméon aurait occupé cette fonction pendant une trentaine d'années, sinon il ne serait pas mentionné comme premier supérieur.

D'après ces témoignages historiques, le couvent appartenait à l'origine aux maronites puis, au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle les deux communautés, maronite et melkite, y auraient cohabité pendant une trentaine d'années, probablement de 1256 à 1282/1283<sup>41</sup>. Après cette année – date de la nomination d'Irimiya ad-Damalsawi patriarche des maronites ou, probablement, un an plus tard, date de la nomination de Siméon supérieur – le couvent cesse définitivement d'appartenir à la communauté maronite et se transmet exclusivement aux melkites. Les justifications de cette transformation subite, restent très obscures. On pourrait admettre, comme explication, que les maronites, vers la fin du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle auraient déserté les lieux pour une raison ou une autre, laissant ainsi la place aux moines melkites. Quoi qu'il en soit, ces témoignages historiques nous renseignent que le couvent aurait abrité à une certaine époque les deux communautés, maronite et melkite. Mais tout ceci demeure au niveau de suppositions et hypothèses.

### 3. Les notices évoquant le monastère de Saint-Jean à Kouzbanda (Koutsovendis)

Comme nous l'avons déjà signalé, la notice la plus ancienne citant le monastère de Kaftoun (1140),

évoque aussi le monastère de Saint-Jean de Kouzbanda à l'île de Chypre comme étant d'appartenance maronite. Il existe d'autres notes, écrites par des patriarches maronites nommant des supérieurs sur ce monastère durant le XII<sup>e</sup>-XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles. Je ne ferai que les citer car elles ont été traduites et publiées.

La notice la plus ancienne remonte à 1120 et est écrite en *Karshuni* par le moine Simon dans le même manuscrit de Jacques de Saroug (où il y a la note avec la date 1140) mais cette fois en syriaque (ms. syr. CXVIII fol. 251-252 de la Bibliothèque Vaticane)<sup>42</sup>. Deux autres notices, encore en *karshuni*, se retrouvent sur le manuscrit du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle de Rabboula (ms. Syr. Laurent. Plut. I.56); l'une est datée de septembre 1153<sup>43</sup>. L'autre, mais cette fois avec un contenu différent des précédentes, nous informe que des moines venus du monastère de Kouzbanda, se sont rendu chez le patriarche sollicitant son aide. La notice est datée de 1238<sup>44</sup>.

L'histoire du monastère de Saint-Jean Chrysostome à Koutsovendis est assez bien connue surtout qu'il a joui au Moyen Âge d'une grande notoriété<sup>45</sup>. Ces murs étaient recouverts de belles fresques datées de la fin du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle ou du début du XII<sup>e</sup><sup>46</sup>. Fondé par le moine Georges, le *katholikon* a été consacré en l'année 1090<sup>47</sup>. Ces témoignages bien précis qui placent le monastère dans son milieu historique et social-religieux affirment son origine orthodoxe dès la fin du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle. Les quatre notices maronites (une cinquième est datée de 1564)<sup>48</sup>, dont trois écrites de la main du patriarche qui nomme un

<sup>40</sup> Ray Jabre Mouawad confirme que le monastère en contrebas du premier était depuis tout temps dédié aux saints Serges et Bacchus (Jabre Mouawad 2001-2002, 95-96).

<sup>41</sup> Il est difficile d'admettre l'hypothèse qui dit que chacune des communautés occupait l'un des deux couvents de Kaftoun, car le monastère des Saints-Serges et Bacchus n'est apparu que vers la fin du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Un article traitant de la datation de ce deuxième couvent sortira bientôt. Sur cette cohabitation voir: Hélou 2007a, 292-294.

<sup>42</sup> Leroy 1964, 235.

<sup>43</sup> Leroy 1964, 146.

<sup>44</sup> Leroy 1964, 146.

<sup>45</sup> Papacostas 2007, 25-156; Mango 1990, 64-67; Mango 1976, 3-13.

<sup>46</sup> Parani 2018; Stylianou/Stylianou 1985, 463-467; Megaw 1956, 15; Hadermann-Misguich 1985, 239.

<sup>47</sup> L'histoire contemporaine du couvent est plutôt funeste: depuis le partage de l'île en 1974, l'armée turque s'y est implantée interdisant toute visite. De plus le *katholikon*, fondé par le moine Georges n'existe plus.

<sup>48</sup> Papacostas 2007, 81.

supérieur sur le couvent de Saint-Jean à Koutsovendis, de nouveau rendent intrigante toute tentative d'attribution de ce monastère qui a toujours été considéré maronite par les historiens de cette même communauté. D'après ces témoignages se créent, tout comme à Kaftoun, l'impression d'une fusion totale des deux communautés ou, je dirai même plus, qu'aucune différence n'a jamais existé et que les maronites étaient melkites et vice versa. On peut alors prétendre que les deux communautés vivaient ensemble en symbiose étant réunis par une foi unique et exclusive en la personne de Jésus-Christ malgré les questions dogmatiques ou théologiques qui pouvaient les différencier ou les séparer. Leur réunion les rend plus fort face à la présence notable des musulmans.

Par ailleurs, on n'a trouvé à Chypre aucune attestation historique mentionnant l'appartenance maronite du monastère, malgré les quatre notices qui précisent concrètement l'existence du monastère maronite à Chypre. Trois de ces notices citent les noms des moines qui y habitaient et dont le nombre ne dépasse pas les six, ce qui prouve qu'il s'agissait d'une petite communauté. L'on peut alors prétendre que cette petite communauté pouvait, soit vivre avec les autres moines du monastère, tout comme à Kaftoun, soit avoir une construction non loin du monastère, version proposée par l'historien du monastère Tassos Papacostas<sup>49</sup>. Déclinant une cohabitation des deux communautés, sans pour autant être impératif, l'auteur avance l'hypothèse de l'existence d'un autre monastère du même nom qui se situerait non loin du premier sur la même colline de Koutsovendis. Des anciennes ruines se trouvant non loin de celui-ci aurait pu, d'après Papacostas, abriter le monastère maronite.

Pourquoi les Maronites se seraient-ils installés à Chypre dès le XII<sup>e</sup> siècle? D'après Papacostas, le gouverneur de Chypre en ce début du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle, Eumathios Philokales, personnage influent, à l'autorité assez forte, aurait fait venir des maronites, connus pour avoir de bonnes relations avec les Francs, afin de préserver la communauté grecque orthodoxe vivant dans les villes du littoral libanais<sup>50</sup>. Cette approche plutôt logique semble être proche de la réalité.

Que les moines maronites aient vécu au sein du monastère de Saint-Jean à Koutsovendis côte à côte avec leurs confrères chypriotes ou qu'ils aient occupé un couvent se situant non loin de celui-ci, c'est un fait que ces moines maronites se sont avérés au sein d'une communauté exclusivement orthodoxe.

Sur la tolérance maronite vis-à-vis des autres communautés Michel le Syrien raconte que l'évêque syrien orthodoxe, Aron du Ségestan, s'était converti à l'Islam en 1151, puis à la confession chalcédonienne avant de retourner à l'Islam. Ayant regretté tout ceci il alla à Jérusalem où il demanda refuge auprès des siens, les Jacobites, mais ceux-ci le refusèrent parmi eux, alors il alla chez les maronites qui habitent le Mont Liban où il mourut<sup>51</sup>.

Partout, tant à Kaftoun qu'à Koutsovendis, tout comme à Behdidat, et à Smar Jbeil s'est créé une situation problématique. On a vu dans la région de Jbeil-Baroun des églises maronites servir à la communauté syriaque (Behdidat et Smar Jbeil). Dans les monastères de Kaftoun et de Koutsovendis les moines maronites et melkites vivaient presque ensembles sans même se soucier qu'il existait quelque différence. Connaissant l'histoire des conflits religieux virulents du IV<sup>e</sup>-VI<sup>e</sup> siècle qui ont abouti à la division de l'Église ancienne et à la création d'autres Églises qui chacune s'attachait à ses propres convictions, il devient difficile de concevoir qu'une telle entente entre elles aurait pu avoir lieu au cours du XII<sup>e</sup>-XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Comment expliquer ces situations très équivoques?

#### LES PEINTURES MURALES: TÉMOIGNAGE DE FUSION INTERCOMMUNAUTAIRE

En l'absence de preuves plus explicites, les peintures dans les églises de cette époque pourraient, en tant que témoignage historique, nous aider à démêler cette situation intrigante. L'on sait que les chrétiens d'Orient ont joui, durant l'occupation des croisés, d'une grande période de prospérité. Celle-ci s'est particulièrement manifestée à travers les travaux de construction. Ces communautés ont certainement toutes construit leurs lieux de cultes mais les églises qui nous sont parvenues se limitent aux trois plus grandes communautés qui sont les maronites, les melkites et les latins. Celles des syriaques jacobites, nestoriens et autres se concentraient dans les grandes villes et plus particulièrement à Tripoli<sup>52</sup>. Cependant la capitale du comté a été rasée par al-Mansour Qalaoun en 1289, et pratiquement rien, ou du moins

<sup>49</sup> Papacostas 2007, 81.

<sup>50</sup> Papacostas 2007, 81.

<sup>51</sup> Chabot 1905, T. III, 291-293.

<sup>52</sup> Hamilton 1980, 209-210.

aucune construction debout, ne nous est parvenue de la ville<sup>53</sup>. Hormis les quelques églises des latins encore conservées ailleurs, telles Saint-Jean de Jbeil et son homonyme à Beyrouth, et qui possèdent leur propre architecture, les édifices religieux des deux autres communautés sont complètement confondus: églises et monastères tant melkites que maronites qui parsèment le Mont Liban, adoptent les mêmes structures qui se répartissent sous trois formes, soit églises basilicales, églises à deux nefs et chapelles à nef unique. Certaines de ces églises, melkites et maronites, ont les murs recouverts de fresques. Celles-ci pourraient, elles, distinguer le style byzantin ou *maniera graeca* du style local, dit syriaque. Selon la logique que l'on peut soutenir et qui semble objective, les peintures exécutées à la *maniera syriaca* doivent appartenir à des églises de rite syriaque (y inclus l'église Maronite) alors que celles possédant des peintures de style byzantin sont de rite melkite. Or la réalité nous offre une image plus ou moins différente.

Prenons en guise d'exemple les fresques du XII<sup>e</sup>-XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. L'église de Saint-Saba à Eddé dans le Batroun abrite des fragments de peintures murales et, plus, une Dormition de la Vierge (Pl. 1). Il s'agit d'un village maronite et d'une église maronite alors que la première couche des fresques montre un style byzantin affirmé. Leur analyse a démontré qu'il s'agit de l'art en vogue à Byzance à la fin du XII<sup>e</sup>-début du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, cet art qui se rattache à la tendance appelée le 'maniérisme comnénien tardif'<sup>54</sup>. Le patriarche Stéphane Douaihi mentionne des travaux de décorations en peinture ayant eu lieu en 1264 à l'église de Saint-Saba<sup>55</sup>. Or à cette date remonte une seule composition, située sur le mur sud et qui représente le reste d'un cheval blanc qui devrait être celui d'un saint cavalier et la Vierge à l'Enfant (Pl. 2). Cette peinture s'avère d'une grande ressemblance stylistique avec les fresques de Behdidat (Pl. 3), déjà évoquée, à en croire De Tarazi, comme de rite syriaque jacobite. L'on peut alors déduire que Saint-Saba étant de rite maronite, abrite deux styles de fresques: l'un byzantin, l'autre syriaque. À ce style du Maître de Behdidat, tel que Mat Immerzeel l'appelle, remontent quelques cycles qui ont été décelés dans le Mont Liban: ce sont les chapelles rupestres de Mar Semaan à Saqiet el-Kheit près de Jbeil et Mart-Chmouni à Hadchit dans la vallée Qadisha (Pls 4-5)<sup>56</sup>. Visiblement ces peintures remontent à un même atelier sinon à un seul artiste. L'on peut joindre à cette série d'églises les

peintures de Mar Charbel à Maad qui appartiennent à la même école mais non au même Maître<sup>57</sup>. Toutes ces églises sont de rite maronite.

Les églises de Kaftoun et de Kfar Hilda (Pls 6-7) sont, elles aussi, tout comme la première couche de Eddé-Batroun d'un style byzantin, mais appartiennent toutes les deux à l'art qui a prospéré dans le monde orthodoxe au cours du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle après la chute de Constantinople aux mains des latins en 1204. D'après les documents qu'on vient de voir, Kaftoun appartenait à un certain moment au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle aux deux communautés maronites et orthodoxes. Kfar Hilda est actuellement orthodoxe, elle l'était aussi probablement à l'époque de l'application des fresques sur le mur<sup>58</sup>.

L'église de Saint-Phocas à Amioun, dont l'architecture relève du style roman proche-oriental, abrite des fresques qui sont d'un style que l'on peut qualifier d'oriental byzantinisant (Pl. 8). Une Résurrection à moitié détruite se déploie dans l'abside, mais restent bien visibles les figures de Salomon, Eve, Abel et l'ange survolant la scène. Malgré l'iconographie et les proportions très byzantines, la rondeur des visages, le traitement en aplat et la prédominance du graphisme soulignent l'appartenance à la tradition locale<sup>59</sup>. Les traits des visages se caractérisent par leurs formes agrandies: yeux grands ouverts qui rappellent l'art oriental, gros nez charnus contrairement à la forme du nez aquilin de l'art comnène qui est mince. Les figures, dépourvues de poids, sont exécutées sommairement et en larges

<sup>53</sup> Hassan Salamé-Sarkis cite Al-Maqrizi et Abu-l-Fida qui donnent tous les deux une description assez réaliste de la destruction de Tripoli par un ordre du sultan mamlouk al-Mansour Qalawoun. Cf. Salamé-Sarkis 1980, 36-37.

<sup>54</sup> Dans son article "From Cyprus to Syria" coécrit avec Bas Snelders, Mat Immerzeel met l'accent sur les relations très étroites qui ont rattaché l'île de Chypre au continent avoisinant et plus précisément à la Syrie et au comté de Tripoli. Voir: Snelders/Immerzeel 2012-2013, 79-106; voir aussi Hérou 2001, 387; *eadem* 2003a, 397-434; Immerzeel 2009, 108-111.

<sup>55</sup> Tawtel 1951, 135.

<sup>56</sup> Pour la question des caractéristiques du style du Maître de Behdidat voir Immerzeel 2009, 111. Voir aussi Hérou 2007b, 38; *eadem* 2008, 64.

<sup>57</sup> Hérou 1999-2000, 139-162; Immerzeel 2009, 105-108.

<sup>58</sup> Hérou 2016, 707-737.

<sup>59</sup> Erica Cruikshank Dodd, Mat Immerzeel et Bas Snelders y ont vu une influence chypriote et datent les fresques de la fin du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle comme ils les font appartenir au style 'maniériste' de l'époque. Cf. Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 158-179; Snelders/Immerzeel 2012-2013, 83-84.



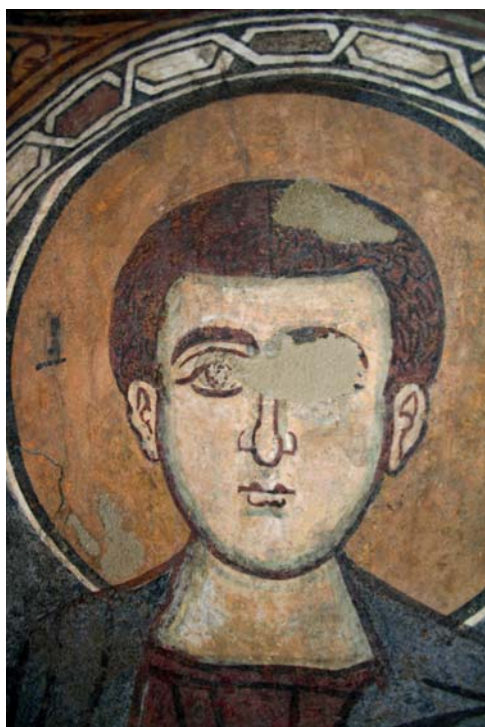


*Pl. 1. Dormition de la Vierge, détail avec les apôtres; Église Saint-Saba, Eddé-Batroun (Mat Immerzeel).*

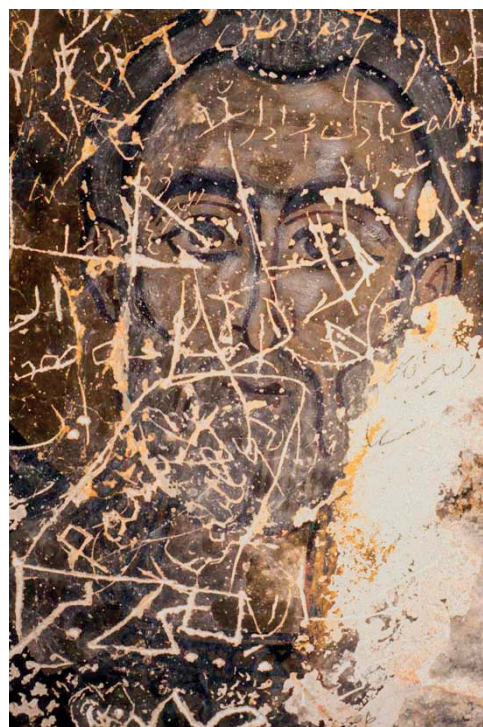


*Pl. 2. Vierge à l'Enfant; Église Saint-Saba, Eddé-Batroun (Mat Immerzeel).*





*Pl. 3. Apôtre; Église Saint-Théodore, Behdidat  
(Mat Immerzeel).*



*Pl. 4. Saint; Chapelle de Mar Semaan, Jbeil  
(Erica Cruikshank Dodd; Index of Christian Art,  
Princeton University).*



*Pl. 5. Apôtre; Église Mart-Chmouni Hadchit  
(Erica Cruikshank Dodd; Index of Christian Art, Princeton University).*





Pl. 6. *Vierge de la Déisis; Église Saint-Serges et Bacchus, Kaftoun (Mat Immerzeel).*



Pl. 7. *Vierge de la Déisis; Église Notre-Dame-des-ruines, Kfar Hilda (Mat Immerzeel).*



Pl. 8. *Le roi Salomon; Église Saint-Phocas, Amioun (Nada Hérou).*



Pl. 9. *Saint Basile le Grand, le prophète Elie, Saint Grégoire de Naziance; Église Saint-Elie, Kfar Qabel (Nada Hérou).*





*Pl. 10. Fragments des vêtements de saint Pierre;  
Église Saint-Georges, Rachkida (Nada Hélou).*



*Pl. 11. Déisis; Église Saint-Georges, Rachkida  
(Nada Hélou).*



*Pl. 12. Saint Jean de la Crucifixion;  
Église Saint-Georges, Rachkida (Nada Hélou).*



*Pl. 13. Saint Chapelle rupestre de Mart Marina,  
Qalamoun (Nada Hélou).*

aplats de couleurs, mais parfois les draperies descendent avec souplesse. Donc l'on discerne ici une sorte de combinaison harmonieuse des deux traditions qui s'expriment dans un contexte architectural latin occidental<sup>60</sup>.

Le couvent de Saint-Elie à Kfar Qahel, connu pour être orthodoxe, possède des peintures qui sont d'un style manifestement oriental (Pl. 9)<sup>61</sup>. Les contours des visages sont tracés par une ombre verdâtre qui laisse dégager les faces des figures pour les mettre en relief. Les rides sur le front de saint Grégoire sont désignées par deux lignes, l'une sombre, l'autre blanche qui se superposent et qui créent ainsi un jeu subtil de profondeurs. Les personnages sont éclairés par des rehauts qui apparaissent sous forme de lignes blanchâtres délicates de part et d'autre du nez. Les yeux sont cernés d'une ligne gris-vert qui se dessine sous la paupière inférieure. Tous ces détails s'apparentent à la tradition byzantine, mais sont représentés ici avec beaucoup plus de simplicité, de schématisme de rigidité sèche que dans la peinture byzantine, ce qui confirme leur origine locale. De plus, la réalisation stylisée et décorative de certains traits des visages s'avère identique chez les trois figures, comme par exemple le dessin des nez, des oreilles et le contour des yeux qui se retrouve dans les fresques exécutées selon la *maniera syriaca* du milieu du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle comme à Behdidat<sup>62</sup>.

Enfin à l'église double de Rachkida, ont été dégagées, sur les murs est, des compositions qui manifestent trois manières différentes<sup>63</sup>. L'abside nord avec la Vierge à l'Enfant et deux suppliants, Pierre et Paul, offre des peintures exécutées d'une façon large, rapide, monumentale, sans attardement aux détails, et qui laissent deviner une main sûre et une personnalité affirmée (Pl. 10). L'abside sud, avec la scène de la Déisis, montre, elle, un style plutôt local qui nous rappelle la manière byzantino orientale (Pl. 11). Par contre dans l'écoinçon entre les deux

absides se déploie une Crucifixion qui est d'un style byzantin prononcé (Pl. 12). Ces compositions se côtoient et sont toutes les trois de manières totalement différentes. Il est évident qu'ici ont travaillé trois maîtres différents et qui sont probablement d'origines différentes, mais deux de ces manières (l'abside nord et l'écoinçon) relèvent de l'art byzantin alors que l'église appartient aux maronites.

Parlant de l'interaction des styles en peinture avec les différentes communautés, l'on ne peut négliger les fresques rupestres de Mart Marina à Qalamoun (une dizaine de km au sud de Tripoli) et que Mat Immerzeel et Bas Snelders ont bien démontré la fusion, cette fois, des latins avec les chrétiens locaux (Pl. 13). L'on retrouve ici des inscriptions latines sur des fresques, bien que fort détériorées, qui sont d'un style byzantin évident. De ce fait, il devient plausible que ces fresques aient été commandées par un donateur latin à un peintre chypriote ou grec qui les aurait exécutées<sup>64</sup>.

D'après ce parcours rapide à travers les fresques du XII<sup>e</sup>-XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle au Liban, l'on constate que les peintres appartenant à des traditions différentes ou étant d'origines différentes recevaient des commandes de donateurs appartenant à des confessions différentes. Ils pouvaient de même collaborer ensemble ou travailler côte à côte comme c'est le cas à Rachkida sans pour autant se soucier de l'appartenance confessionnelle de l'église. Il est bien sûr difficile de deviner l'origine de chacun d'eux mais ce qui est clair est que les artistes, quelle que soit leurs appartenances, travaillaient chez leurs commanditaires, qui, eux aussi pouvaient se rattacher à des communautés différentes.

Ainsi la *maniera graeca* caractérise les fresques des églises melkites de Kaftoun et de Kfar Hilda tout comme les fresques des églises maronites de Eddé Batroun ou de Rachkida. De son côté, le style local que je qualifierais de *maniera syriaca* transgresse, lui aussi, les limites des églises maronites, comme Behdidat et Maad, pour se manifester dans des églises melkites comme celles d'Amioun, ou de Kfar Qahel.

Une situation semblable s'opère dans des constructions d'appartenance latines évidentes. Ainsi plusieurs fragments de fresques de style typiquement syrien ont été retrouvées au sein de la citadelle croisée du Crac des Chevaliers. Parmi ces peintures, une Entrée au Temple (conservé au Musée de Tartous), avec la figure d'un donateur dont le nom, Simonin, est inscrit en latin<sup>65</sup>. D'autres compositions

<sup>60</sup> Coupel 1941, 46-52.

<sup>61</sup> Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 180-185; Hérou 2008, 25-27; Immerzeel 2009, 100; Nordiguian 1999, 55-61; Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 393-394; Zibawi 2009, 60.

<sup>62</sup> Hérou 2010, 293-309.

<sup>63</sup> Les peintures de l'église de Rachkida sont en voie de nettoyage et conservation par l'équipe russe sous la direction du regretté Vladimir Sarabianov en 2012.

<sup>64</sup> Snelders/Immerzeel 2012-2013, 86.

<sup>65</sup> Immerzeel 2009, 74-75. Mahmoud Zibawi considère que le nom du donateur est un rajout ultérieur. Cf. Zibawi 2009, 82.



ont été découvertes sur les murs extérieurs de la chapelle du Crac telles saint Georges sauvant l'enfant de Mytilène ou la Vierge à l'Enfant. Le même cas se retrouve à la citadelle de Marqab près de Banyas, où sont encore visibles des scènes de pentecôte et de Nativité<sup>66</sup>. Toutes ces scènes s'avèrent d'un style local évident qui appartient à la *maniera syriaca*. Elles se trouvent dans un contexte exclusivement latin.

Il est de même connu qu'en Terre sainte latins et melkites-orthodoxes ont coopéré. La chapelle de la Nativité à Bethléem qui, à l'époque des croisés était sous l'emprise de ceux-là, a assisté à plusieurs reprises à des travaux de décorations. Dans l'une des circonstances deux inscriptions attestent le travail de deux artistes Basilius et Ephraïm qui ont décoré en mosaïques l'église de la Nativité. L'une des inscriptions, datée de 1167 est bilingue, elle est écrite en grec et en latin, et mentionne les noms des commanditaires qui sont l'empereur byzantin, le roi franc de Jérusalem ainsi que son patriarche avec le nom du mosaïste Ephraïm qui est un Grec<sup>67</sup>. Une autre inscription écrite en syriaque atteste le nom de Basilius qui est un artiste d'origine syrienne. Ces deux exemples, où les commanditaires sont à la fois les monarques byzantin et latin, montrent que ceux-ci ont fait appel à des artistes locaux et grecs pour décorer l'église. Ceci prouve bien sûr que les communautés chrétiennes de Terre sainte s'entendaient bien ensembles et étaient prêtes à collaborer. Mais dans cette entente se cache un fait très significatif: les occidentaux, étant de grands maîtres de la taille de pierre excellaient en matière d'architecture et de sculpture (c'est à cet époque que se situe le rayonnement de l'art roman puis gothique en Europe), ils construisaient et décoraient en sculptures leurs églises de leurs propres mains<sup>68</sup>. La situation est différente en ce qui concerne la peinture: vu la grande renommée des byzantins et des chrétiens d'orient dans l'art de la peinture, les francs préféraient faire appel aux maîtres locaux.

Ainsi l'on peut déduire qu'il n'existait pas de barrière séparant les Églises et que les communautés s'échangeaient les artistes. Encore plus, il s'avère même que dans les pratiques liturgiques des chrétiens d'orient, plus précisément celles de la Divine Liturgie, il n'existait pas de différences fondamentales, car toutes se fondent sur une structure presque semblable pour ne pas dire identique<sup>69</sup>. Ceci s'est surtout reflété à travers les sujets mêmes

iconographiques qui étaient utilisés par toutes les communautés. Ainsi le thème de prédilection était la Théophanie-Déisis qui peuplait généralement les conques des absides des églises tant maronites que melkites. Une théorie d'apôtres ou d'évêques couvrirait la paroi absidale, une annonce se plaçait dans l'arc de l'abside et sur les murs défilaient des saints en pied ou à cheval. Ce même schéma se retrouve, à quelque différence près, dans toutes ces églises qui se pliaient aux mêmes programmes iconographiques sans aucune distinction.

## CONCLUSION

En définitive, l'examen de sources littéraires d'une part et d'autre part d'églises peintes du Moyen Âge disséminées dans le comté de Tripoli, porte à croire que les frontières et plus singulièrement les frontières 'mentales' dressées entre les communautés chrétiennes pouvaient faire preuve de souplesse. En effet, le travail des artistes peintres n'était pas confiné aux seules églises de leur propre appartenance confessionnelle. Au contraire, d'autres communautés pouvaient également faire appel à leur savoir-faire artistique de manière qu'on pourrait qualifier de 'naturelle' et dépourvue de 'tension'. De la même manière, les moines maronites, melkites, syriaques orthodoxes entre autres pouvaient sans doute se partager les mêmes lieux de culte que ce soit monastère ou église.

Dans cette perspective, l'existence d'une cohabitation réelle et *a fortiori* d'une forme de tolérance entre les communautés chrétiennes examinées plus haut nous paraît vraisemblable, en espérant que de nouvelles recherches viendront appuyer notre hypothèse.

<sup>66</sup> Immerzeel 2009, 76; Zibawi 2009, 84-87.

<sup>67</sup> Folda 1995, 347-353.

<sup>68</sup> Pour la sculpture dans le Royaume de Jérusalem voir: Buschhausen 1978.

<sup>69</sup> Dans sa thèse de doctorat soutenue à Poitiers en 2016, Rafca Youssef Nasr, étudiant les peintures murales du Liban en fonction de leur relation avec la liturgie montre, tout en se fondant sur les sources écrites, que la structure générale ou fondamentale des différentes liturgies eucharistiques est quasi semblable dans toutes les confessions chrétiennes. Cf. Nasr 2016.

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## *Between Catacomb and Sanctuary: The Creation, Diffusion and Elaboration of the Iconography of the Virgin Mary in Late Antique and Early Medieval Egypt*

Sabrina C. HIGGINS

### INTRODUCTION

In the ruins of Egypt's ancient churches, monasteries and tombs, we occasionally come across traces of the wall paintings that would have once adorned these structures, giving us a glimpse into the formerly thriving visual culture of Egyptian Christianity<sup>1</sup>. While the dry climate and shifting desert sands have preserved a relatively large number of paintings from Christian Egypt compared to elsewhere in the Mediterranean, they nevertheless represent only a fraction of the images that once abounded the walls of buildings across Egypt.

The survival of these paintings has encouraged the production of an immense body of literature. Until this point, however, studies have largely appeared in two distinct forms: studies of a particular iconographic theme, such as the *Galaktotrophousa* (nursing Virgin), or of a complete iconographic programme at a specific location, for example, the monastery of Apa Apollo at Bawit. While these studies have provided us with invaluable evidence about the corpus of images from Late Antique and Early Medieval Egypt, they have also paved the way for a third type of study, one which collects, catalogues and analyzes the entire iconographic corpus of an individual saint and contextualizes the images within their distinct spatial and temporal parameters. In adopting such a framework, it is then possible to situate the development of specific iconographic themes within their historical contexts, taking into account any apparent diachronic developments, while also highlighting the unique spatial considerations for the placement of each of these images. As a result, this type of study traces the development of a saint's iconography across the *longue durée*, beginning with its initial introduction into the artistic corpus of a particular region. Within such a framework, moreover, the emerging visual culture can be discussed in relation to the theological currents of the period in question. We must

also recognize, however, the limitations of such an approach, particularly given that the dating of artistic works is problematic and wide chronological ranges must often be provided. Nevertheless, this study seeks to highlight the general iconographic trends that emerge, with these theoretical parameters in mind, through a diachronic analysis of the artistic repertoire of a particular saint, ultimately providing a catalogue of the extant wall paintings and establishing a broad framework that can contextualize the spatial and temporal developments that emerge from this type of inquiry.

The present article applies such an approach to the iconography of the Virgin Mary to furnish a complete analysis of all extant Marian wall paintings in Egypt from the third to the tenth centuries CE<sup>2</sup>. The temporal parameters of this article are dictated by two factors: the initial appearance of Mary in the iconographic record of Egypt in the third century and the Fatimid conquest of Egypt in 969, after which point there is a marked increase in conversions to Islam<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, this broad diachronic framework bears witness to the intensive development and diversification of Marian iconography,

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Jitse Dijkstra, Mat Immerzeel and the anonymous reader for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this article.

<sup>2</sup> This article builds on the third chapter of the author's unpublished PhD dissertation, entitled *Embodying the Virgin: The Physical Materialization of the Cult of Mary in Late Antique Egypt (Fifth-Ninth Centuries CE)* (University of Ottawa, 2015). Rather than looking at the development of Marian iconography from a thematic perspective, as in the dissertation, this article traces the dissemination of the material on a chronological axis, while including wall paintings dating up to the tenth century.

<sup>3</sup> For a general discussion of Egyptian Christianity during this period, see Gabra 2002, 6-18; Wipszycka 2009; and Pruitt 2013. Note that church renovations and decoration extend beyond the tenth century, and that this particular period serves as an arbitrary, but necessary, terminal point for this discussion.



much of which becomes prominent in the Medieval period and beyond. A thorough study of these images is impeded, however, by the limited preservation of Late Antique and Medieval structures, including churches, domestic buildings, funerary chapels, and to a lesser extent, monastic complexes<sup>4</sup>. Even in cases where the structures are standing to a significant height, their exposure to the elements over the centuries – or post-excavation – has caused large-scale degradation to the paintings, and few entire iconographic programmes have survived in the archaeological record. Thus, the analysis of the majority of the paintings collected in this article, by necessity, relies heavily on descriptions and photographs that were published in excavation reports. In total, the article presents 52 distinct images of Mary and is based on what is undoubtedly only a small part of the total number of Marian images that would have once adorned both religious and secular buildings of Late Antique and Early Medieval Egypt<sup>5</sup>.

Although we are consequently left with but a sample of the paintings that would have featured Mary, we can, nonetheless, chronicle the elaboration

of her visual culture by establishing a chronological framework for the appearance, and the subsequent development and elaboration, of specific iconographic themes in Egypt. The organization of the material in such a manner, then, allows us to more broadly contextualize the notable changes within the imagery to any relevant historical or contemporary texts that might have influenced their creation, setting the scene for a wider discussion of the cult of the Virgin Mary. By bridging the gap between the textual evidence and iconography associated with her cult, this article ultimately argues that the visual culture of the Virgin Mary, at least in wall paintings, did not coalesce until the sixth or seventh century.

#### THE THIRD/FOURTH CENTURY: THE INITIAL APPEARANCE OF MARY

The so-called Wescher Tomb at Kom el-Shoqafa in south-west Alexandria bore the oldest representation of Mary's likeness on a wall painting in Egypt<sup>6</sup>. Traces of several saints adorned the central court of the tomb, which took the shape of a Latin cross, but the scene in question was painted in the apse of the western *exedra*, directly above a bench. Here, Mary serves as a peripheral character in a narrative frieze that highlights the Miracles of Christ, notably the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:5-14) – an iconographic type which makes reference to the sacrament of the Eucharist in Early Christian art<sup>7</sup>. Such a scene is fitting, moreover, within this particular spatial context, as it provides a visual reference to the Eucharist in a milieu in which the *agape* feast may have been celebrated. At the centre of the painting stands Christ, flanked by twelve baskets of bread. He is approached on either side by the apostles Peter and Andrew, the latter of whom presents Him with a plate of fish. Mary, on the other hand, is found to the left of the central scene, standing behind a group of four seated individuals who seemingly partake in an *agape* feast themselves. Mary's participation in this scene is signalled by an inscription, but her spectral presence otherwise lacks any identifying features<sup>8</sup>.

Although she does not play a central role in this painting, nor is she afforded prominence of place, this image, nevertheless, marks the introduction of Mary into the visual corpus of Egyptian Christian art. This initial representation, however, is an outlier

<sup>4</sup> The disproportionate number of wall paintings coming from monastic sites is largely owed to the degree to which monasteries have been studied and published, as well as their overall levels of preservation, particularly given that they were often constructed of mudbrick and were not robbed for building material, as we find with the larger churches. Additionally, they are generally located on the outskirts of the desert, which typically ensured that they remained abandoned once they had fallen out of use.

<sup>5</sup> Note that each instance in which Mary is illustrated is counted as a distinct representation, so that narrative friezes containing images of the Virgin may yield multiple iterations of her likeness. Moreover, this study only includes Marian wall paintings that have been published in excavation reports, journals, books, websites, and so forth. All unpublished materials are excluded from the analysis.

<sup>6</sup> Wescher 1865, 57-59. The tomb takes its name from Carl Wescher, the first individual to extensively publish the tomb. The tomb was lost before the end of the nineteenth century. While Wescher identified the catacomb as third-century in date, a late third/early fourth century date for the painting cannot be excluded, as the catacomb was used into the early fourth century, see Empereur 1995, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Venit 2002, 185; Zibawi 2003, 17-18; Hunt 2007, 403; van Loon 2010a, 102. This painting was originally misidentified as the Wedding at Cana. Cf. de Rossi 1865, 74 and Adriani 1966, 185. For the image, see Leclercq 1924, Fig. 279.

<sup>8</sup> Note that the inscription reads ἡ ἁγία Μαρία, but the associated figure is typically interpreted as the Virgin Mary. See Venit 2002, 184.

in our study, as it represents the only extant painting of Mary before the fifth century and the iconography is firmly rooted within the artistic tradition of the Roman catacombs<sup>9</sup>. That is not to say, however, that her appearance in this scene should be discounted, as it marks a starting point for the development of a distinct Marian iconography, notably its use of a New Testament theme in the development of a visual culture for the emerging cult of Mary.

#### THE FIFTH TO SEVENTH CENTURIES: MARIAN ICONOGRAPHY IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE COUNCIL OF EPHESUS

The impetus for the development of iconographic programmes, in which Mary played an increasingly prominent role, is believed to have been tied to the theological developments of the fifth century, in particular, her declaration as Theotokos ('God-Bearer') at the Council of Ephesus in 431. This proclamation was spurred on by a need to stress the interdependence of Christ and Mary in theological discourse, through the definition of the true nature of Christ<sup>10</sup>. It was her newly affirmed importance in the developing Christology, which eventually led to the creation of a distinct iconography for Mary and the diversification of her imagery beyond simple reiterations of New Testament themes. One would expect, then, to encounter a surge in the production of Marian imagery in the immediate aftermath of the Council. Instead, the extant evidence suggests that visual representations of the Virgin do not appear with any frequency until the sixth and seventh centuries<sup>11</sup>. In fact, only a single extant image potentially dates to the fifth century (a sixth- or seventh-century date cannot be excluded), and it draws exclusively on a New Testament narrative, the Annunciation.

The iconography of the Annunciation represents the pictorial interpretation of Luke 1:26-38, in which the archangel Gabriel announces the miraculous birth of Jesus to the Virgin Mary. In doing so, it creates a visual framework through which the believer can conceptualize the Incarnation and the Immaculate Conception<sup>12</sup>. The image in question stems from the dome of the Chapel of Peace, a funerary chapel at the El-Bagawat Necropolis in the Kharga Oasis, where it is surrounded by numerous disjointed scenes from both the Old and the New Testament, including Adam and Eve, as well as Paul and Thecla (Fig. 1)<sup>13</sup>. In this instance, Mary



Fig. 1. *Annunciation; Chapel of Peace, Kharga Oasis (Fakhry 1951, Fig. 70).*

stands in a gesture of prayer while a dove approaches her from the right with the message of the infant

<sup>9</sup> On the Multiplication of the Loaves in paleo-Christian art, see Mazzei 2000, 220-221.

<sup>10</sup> The impetus for this Council is the Theotokos/Christotokos debate that emerged between Cyril of Alexandria and Nestorius, on which see, generally, Norris 1980; Wessel 1999; McGuckin 2004; Wessel 2004; Russell 2012, 218-225.

<sup>11</sup> Such findings draw a sharp contrast to the visual culture of Rome, for example, in the fifth century when we see a surge of Marian art, especially the mosaics at S. Maria Maggiore. See Beckwith 1979, 15-16.

<sup>12</sup> Rutschowskaya 1991, 528.

<sup>13</sup> Cipriano 2008, 235.

Jesus' impending birth. Both the theme of the image and its immediate context highlight the linear trend in the development of early Marian imagery discussed thus far – the continued reliance on New Testament themes as artistic inspiration, even in the aftermath of Mary's declaration as Theotokos<sup>14</sup>.

The sixth and seventh centuries, however, are arguably the most significant for the creation and diffusion of Marian iconography. They represent a transitional period between the renderings of Mary in funerary art, which bear a distinct narrative component that resonates closely with the artistic tradition of the Roman catacombs, to the artistic conceptualization of Mary as the Theotokos – that is, a visual culture for Mary which is increasingly didactic and relies less on the explicit pictorial translation of New Testament themes – the spatial focus of which now shifts to churches and prayer rooms<sup>15</sup>. In addition, this period marks the first instance, within the extant Egyptian wall paintings, that Mary is portrayed as an enthroned Virgin<sup>16</sup>. Thus, this period denotes the diversification of

Marian art, particularly in terms of the creation of new iconographies and the application of these images to varying spaces, of which funerary contexts continue to play a role.

These changes are best exemplified by a painting from the crypt at Kom Abu Jirjah, southeast of Alexandria (dated initially to the sixth/seventh century, although an eighth-century date is also likely), which marks the last extant image of Mary within a funerary context<sup>17</sup>. In this instance, we encounter a second iteration of the Annunciation, which employs the narrative structure typical of funerary art, while also incorporating elements associated with contemporary efforts of artistic renewal<sup>18</sup>. Notably, this version of the Annunciation more accurately reflects the narrative of Luke through its use of Gabriel as the divine messenger, although it varies from the earlier manifestation of this scene by rendering Mary enthroned<sup>19</sup>. As such, it reflects a turning point in the visual conception of Mary, whereby New Testament themes are adapted to reflect the changing way in which Mary is artistically conceived. In this vein, we encounter a shift towards the creation of more abstract allusions to these narratives, which incorporate the recently outlined theological and liturgical developments, while also drawing inspiration from the apocrypha and the artistic convention of the enthroned mother, which was a common element in many ancient representations of women, especially goddesses and seated women in paleo-Christian funerary art<sup>20</sup>.

Throughout the sixth and seventh centuries, therefore, we see the gradual introduction of new iconographies which build on the conceptualization of Mary as Theotokos by introducing visual clues that signal to Mary's importance within the emerging Christology, such as the near complete shift to the representation of Mary as an enthroned Virgin. This period also sees the creation of several new iconographic themes, both biblical and extra-biblical in their inspiration, in which Mary takes on a central role. In Egyptian monastic art, we can distinguish five new thematic developments in the sixth and seventh centuries: Double Compositions, Enthroned Mary and Child in Single-Tiered Compositions, *Galaktotrophousa*, Enthroned Virgin without Child, and Miscellaneous Marian themes – that is, themes that occur only once in the extant corpus of Marian imagery.

The double composition is the most prevalent of these iconographic themes, characteristically appearing

<sup>14</sup> The content of the dome paintings is reminiscent of the images found in early Christian catacombs and churches. See Venit 1988, 83-85.

<sup>15</sup> Jensen 2013, 94-98 notes that this shift is seen as early as the fourth and fifth centuries in Rome, especially as early Christian art transitions from its presence in the catacombs to its occurrence in church decoration. Narrative scenes continue to be used, especially on liturgical objects, well into the sixth and seventh centuries in Rome. Unfortunately, the limited evidence from Egypt before the sixth century makes a comparative analysis of this transition difficult, although the extant material suggests a close affiliation with the catacomb tradition for the pre-sixth century materials.

<sup>16</sup> Images of the enthroned Virgin have their roots in the mid-third/early-fourth century funerary art of the Roman catacombs, particularly paintings depicting the Adoration of the Magi. See Parlbay 2007, 120.

<sup>17</sup> Rassart-Debergh 1982, 94 notes that the nature of the architecture at Kom Abu Jirjah is unclear and may constitute the remains of a monastery. The crypt itself is located beneath an apsidal structure.

<sup>18</sup> There are two images of the Annunciation which potentially date to the sixth/seventh centuries. The first is located in the Crypt of the Monastery of Abu Jirjah, on which see Rassart-Debergh 1981, 91-107 (Fig. 2.4). Cf. Rutschowskaya 1991, 528, who dates the image to the eighth century. See also Breccia 1912, 3-14, and 1914, 285-286. The second is found in Chapel LI at the Monastery of Apa Apollo at Bawit, on which see Clédar 1999, 110-114 (Pls 109-113), esp. n. 63 for a complete discussion of the issues of dating this painting.

<sup>19</sup> Rassart-Debergh 1982, Fig. 2.4.

<sup>20</sup> Cameron 2004, 13.



in modest, monastic settings, particularly in the eastern apse behind the altar in prayer rooms and churches. Typically, we find an enthroned Christ within a *mandorla* in an upper zone, while Mary and the apostles and/or local saints appear in a lower zone. While the general organization of the double compositions remains relatively consistent, there are elements which vary from one image to the next, including the presence or absence of the four creatures of the apocalypse, the sun and moon and angels in the upper zone, and the arrangement of the Virgin and Child and their accompanying figures in the lower zone. There is a marked disparity among scholars, however, as to the meaning of these compositions. For some, notably Dewald, these scenes are representations of the Ascension, which reflect the narratives in the canonical gospels of Mark (16:19), Luke (24:50-51) and the Acts of the Apostles (1:9-12), as well as the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus* (14)<sup>21</sup>, while others have argued that they represent theophanic visions, in which Christ is depicted in Majesty at his Second Coming, announced at the moment of the Ascension<sup>22</sup>.

For the most part, however, recent scholarship has avoided these all-encompassing terms, arguing that there is little evidence to assume that either the liturgy or the feast of the Ascension had monumental bearings on the iconography of these double compositions. Instead, we recognize the presence of several complex representations of different gospel and apocryphal narratives, which embody distinctly Egyptian beliefs, practices and traditions<sup>23</sup>. As such, we must opt for a pluri-dimensional interpretation of the double compositions, which recognizes the continuing action of Christ, while also engaging with the paradox that exists in the figure of Christ, who both takes of his mother's breast and reigns over heaven and earth<sup>24</sup>. The difficulty in categorizing and assigning meaning to these images is further illustrated when the two-tiered compositions are sub-divided into three distinct types, recognizing the variable configurations within the lower tier: Mary in a medallion, Mary enthroned with Child and Mary *orans*<sup>25</sup>.

There are eleven extant double compositions that are dated to the sixth and seventh centuries, all of which stem from the monasteries of Apa Apollo at Bawit and Apa Jeremiah at Saqqara<sup>26</sup>. At the outset, these images are exclusively found in monastic cells and small chapels and are spatially limited to the eastern prayer niche or on the eastern wall of

such rooms: the direction in which the monks would have prayed. Despite the close physical proximity of these paintings to one another and their restriction to two excavated monasteries, there are notable variations in the manner in which they are executed. The first type, Mary within a medallion, appears only once, in a sixth- or seventh-century painting from Chapel B at Saqqara (Pl. 1)<sup>27</sup>. Mary is most frequently depicted, however, in the second type, enthroned with Child. There are eight instances in which this image occurs and each is unique in its design and configuration. This diversity is best illustrated by two images from Saqqara. In Cell F, an enthroned Mary holds her child in her left lap, flanked by the archangels Gabriel and Michael and six local saints, one of whom is a woman and two others are identified as Apa Peter and Apa Enoch

<sup>21</sup> Dewald 1915, 278-290, argues that the iconography of the Ascension evolved from these texts into two different types: Hellenistic and Oriental. The Oriental type is further subdivided into the Syrian and Palestinian types and the Egyptian double composition takes elements from both of these forms.

<sup>22</sup> Grabar 1926, 207-213. Cf. Ihm 1960, 95-108, sees a relationship between these images and the festivals of the Ascension and Pentecost, noting that the double compositions reflect both the ascent and descent of Christ, which is manifested as Christ in Majesty in the upper zone and the incarnation and founding of the Church (or 'local' Church) in the lower zone. See also Walters 1974, 127-128.

<sup>23</sup> Dewald 1915, 289-290. The Egyptian double compositions frequently include representations of local saints alongside Mary – who appears either enthroned with child or as an *orant* – in the lower zone, whereas other comparable representations, particularly those from the Syrian and Palestinian traditions, typically only portray the archangels and the apostles next to Mary, who stands almost exclusively in the *orans*-position.

<sup>24</sup> Walters 1974, 128-129; van Moorsel 2000a, 97-106 and 2000b, 107-114; Innemée 2013, 189-193.

<sup>25</sup> These categorizations are not meant to provide a new framework through which these paintings should be studied, but merely to organize the scenes into manageable discussions. In doing so, this article, by extension, demonstrates the difficulty in assigning a definitive meaning to these images, and opts for a more ritual or symbolic understanding of the theme, which ties back to the dichotomy of Christ's heavenly rule and Mary's role in the Incarnation.

<sup>26</sup> Monastery of Apa Jeremiah at Saqqara: Quibell 1908, 65 (Pls 46, 47 and 49) and Pl. 55; *idem* 1912, 22 (never photographed), 23 (Pl. 25), 67 (Pl. 59) and Pl. 24 (no description); Monastery of Apa Apollo at Bawit: Clédar 1904, 517-526 (Pl. 1); *idem* 1904/1906, 13-29 (Pl. 21), 73-85 (Pls 40-44); Maspero 1931, 20-23 (Pls 21-24), 31-32 (Pls 31-34).

<sup>27</sup> Quibell 1908, 65 (Pl. 46) and Walters 1974, 122.





*Pl. 1. Double Composition: Mary in a Medallion;  
Chapel B, Monastery of Apa Jeremiah, Saqqara  
(Quibell 1908, Pl. 46).*



*Pl. 2. Double Composition: Enthroned Mary and Child;  
Cell F, Monastery of Apa Jeremiah, Saqqara  
(Quibell 1908, Pl. 55).*



*Pl. 3. Double Composition: Mary Orans; Chapel XVII,  
Monastery of Apa Apollo, Bawit  
(Clédat 1904/1906, Pl. 40).*



*Pl. 4. Double Composition: Mary Orans; Room 20,  
Monastery of Apa Apollo, Bawit  
(Maspero 1931, Pl. 32).*

(Pl. 2)<sup>28</sup>. In contrast, Cell 1723 shows an enthroned Mary holding a beardless Christ in a *clipeus*, where she is flanked only by the two archangels<sup>29</sup>. Another significant variation within this iconography appears in Chapel XLII at Bawit, where we encounter the enthroned Mary as *Galaktotrophousa* flanked by fourteen individuals<sup>30</sup>.

The third type of double compositions, Mary *orans*, can be differentiated from the previous examples by the presence of Mary in a gesture of prayer and the absence of the infant Jesus in the lower tier. There are only two extant images of this type, both of which are situated in the eastern niches of the so-called chapels (Chapel XVII and Room 20) at the Monastery of Apa Apollo at Bawit (Pls 3-4). As with most paintings from Bawit, they are no more precisely dated than the sixth to eighth centuries, although the image in Chapel XVII may appear slightly later on the temporal axis (seventh/eighth century)<sup>31</sup>. Both images, moreover, depict Mary alongside the apostles, an element of the iconography which is not consistent throughout the other iterations of the theme. This marked disparity and lack of uniformity in the way in which all of the images are structured reinforces the difficulty in assigning a particular theme (for example, Ascension, Christ in Majesty, Theophany, and so on) to these double compositions – a broadly-defined term adopted in this article to reflect the diversity of the images. Thus, we must abandon our strict iconographic typologies and opt for an interpretation of these compositions that does not separate Christ's Ascension from his continuing action, which defies both space and time. Such an approach is especially pertinent given the uniqueness of each double composition, all of which draw on different elements from the Old and New Testaments, apocrypha, liturgy, hymns, and patristic writings to create a completely different rendering of the scene<sup>32</sup>.

The sixth and seventh centuries also bear witness to the emergence of single-tiered manifestations of the Enthroned Virgin and Child, of which there are ten representations. Whereas the double compositions offer a multi-faceted reading of the scene that encompasses both Christ's Ascension and Second-Coming, the single-tiered compositions specifically highlight Mary's role as Theotokos, as defined by the Council of Ephesus<sup>33</sup>. Here, Mary assumes a Christological function, in which she serves to highlight Christ's divinity and, when flanked by the archangels, acts as a metaphor for the Eucharist<sup>34</sup>. As such,

the imagery intentionally focuses on the interdependence of the Virgin and infant Jesus, who is placed on her lap. There are two iterations of this theme; in the first, the pair is rendered independent of subsidiary figures<sup>35</sup>, while in the second they are flanked by the archangels and/or local saints<sup>36</sup>. Although the images are uniquely Christian in their meaning, we can nevertheless draw visual parallels to Egyptian, Greco-Roman, Near Eastern and European images of enthroned mother goddesses (for example, Mut and Cybele)<sup>37</sup>.

The earliest depiction of the enthroned Mary and Child in a single-tiered painting comes from a sixth-century domestic context, the courtyard of House D at Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria (Fig. 2)<sup>38</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Quibell 1908, Pl. 55. Quibell only includes a partially visible photograph of this painting in his excavation report, without a discussion of the double composition. Its chance publication is owed to its proximity to the painting of the Hebrews in the fiery furnace, which is located to its proper left. Brief descriptions are given, however, in Walters 1974, 123, and Rassart-Debergh 1981, 216-218 (Fig. 2), the latter suggesting that this unnamed female without a *nimbus* is Ama Sibylla, who is often mentioned in the same inscriptions as Enoch and Jeremiah and is depicted on several occasions in the decorations at Bawit.

<sup>29</sup> Quibell 1912, 23 (Pl. 25), argues that Mary is holding a *clipeus* of a beardless saint rather than Jesus. This is unlikely, as it is inconsistent with the iconography of the double compositions. Cf. Walters 1974, 123; Shepherd Payer 1991, 543.

<sup>30</sup> Clédât 1999, 46 (Pls 46 and 48-51).

<sup>31</sup> Chapel XVII: Clédât 1904/1906, 73-85. On the dating, see Bolman 2001, 44, who attributes the painting to the seventh century based on an earlier layer of ornamental painting which bears similarities to the sixth-century decoration at Kellia, and a *terminus ante quem* is established by a graffito that overlies it, which dates to 753. For the painting in Room 20, see Maspero 1931, 31-32 (Pls 31-34); Walters 1974, 122.

<sup>32</sup> Van Moorsel 2000, 111-112.

<sup>33</sup> Kalavrezou 1990, 167-168.

<sup>34</sup> Bolman 2016, 144.

<sup>35</sup> Cell 1943, Saqqara: Quibell 1912, 28 (no photograph, described only as 'a picture of the Virgin and Child'); north east column of North Church: Clédât 1999, Pl. 184.

<sup>36</sup> House D, Kom el-Dikka: Rodziewicz 1984, 199-204 (Fig. 236); Cell 1719, Saqqara: Quibell 1912, Pl. 23; Room 1, Bawit: Maspero 1931, 15-16 (Pl. 8b); Chapel VII, Bawit: 133-148 (never photographed); Chapel XXVIII, Bawit: Clédât 1904/1906, 154-157 (Pls 96b and 98); Chapel XXXII, Bawit: Clédât 1904/1906, 13 (never photographed); Chapel LV, Bawit: Clédât 1999, 149-150 (Pls 131-134); North pillar, Isis temple, Aswan: Bresciani/Pernigotti 1978, 39-41 (Pl. 27).

<sup>37</sup> Muthmann 1975; Dunand 2000, 161.

<sup>38</sup> Rodziewicz 1984, 199-204 (Fig. 236); Haas 1997, 200-203; Mathews/Muller in Vassilaki 2005, 4; McKenzie 2007, 238 (Fig. 406).





Fig. 2. *Enthroned Virgin and Child; Courtyard of House D, Kom el-Dikka, Alexandria* (Rodziewicz 1984, Fig. 236).

Following this first appearance, the type is preserved almost exclusively in monastic contexts during the sixth and seventh centuries, with the exception of its depiction in the church within the Isis temple at Aswan, which dates between the sixth and ninth centuries<sup>39</sup>. In comparison with the double compositions, these images display a greater fluidity in their configurations and a wider geographical reach, as they also appear in both domestic and ecclesiastical structures, ranging as far north as Alexandria and

as far south as Aswan. In addition, the images are not limited to the apses and niches of monastic cells, and we see a movement towards incorporating Mary – as Theotokos – into the more generalized iconographic programme of ecclesiastical buildings, where, for example, she appears on a pillar in the church in the Isis temple at Aswan. Thus, it can be noted that, for this theme at least, there was a more diverse use rather than a purely monastic one.

The sixth/seventh century also saw the introduction of a variant to the traditional image of the enthroned Virgin and Child, the *Galaktotrophousa*. This particular iconography depicts an enthroned Mary with Jesus seated on her right knee, offering her right breast with her left hand<sup>40</sup>. Furthermore, Mary is typically portrayed as hieratic with little-to-no visual interaction with her child. In Egypt, images of the *Galaktotrophousa* survive exclusively in monastic contexts<sup>41</sup> and are most commonly found in the eastern wall niches of monastic cells, of which there are five extant examples: three at the Monastery of Apa Jeremiah at Saqqara and two in the Monastery of Apa Apollo at Bawit<sup>42</sup>. The enthroned Virgin and Child appear alone in a single painting from Bawit (Pl. 5)<sup>43</sup>. Whereas the remaining images depict them centrally, amongst varying saints, apostles or archangels, the paintings are not consistent in their composition (for an example, see Pl. 6)<sup>44</sup>. Despite these iconographic differences, each image draws upon a shared ritual significance within the context of the cell – that is, their placement in the eastern niche; again, the direction of prayer<sup>45</sup>.

Aside from the examples preserved in monastic cells, there is a single surviving painting of the *Galaktotrophousa* in the northern semi-dome of the church of Anba Bishay at the so-called Red Monastery in Sohag (Pl. 7). This painting is more securely dated to the second half of the sixth century and marks the first surviving instance in which the Virgin is monumentalized in Egyptian wall painting<sup>46</sup>. The Virgin and Child occupy the centre of the scene, flanked by four prophets (from left to right: Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Daniel). Two elaborate arches frame the prophets, each pier bearing a representation of four additional saints, identified by inscriptions as ‘Elijah the Tishbite’, ‘the Apostle Peter’, ‘the Apostle Paul’, and ‘Moses the Lawgiver’. In the upper register of the semi-dome, Joseph (left) and Salome (right) look down on the scene below from the corners, as Michael and Gabriel flank the central Virgin and Child<sup>47</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> Bresciani/Pernigotti 1978, 39–41 (Pl. 27); Dijkstra/van Loon 2010; *idem* 2013.

<sup>40</sup> Van Moorsel 1991, 531; Bolman, 2016, 142. There is one instance (Church of Anba Bishay at the Red Monastery in Sohag), where we find the reverse: Mary offers her left breast with her right hand, while Jesus sits on her left knee.

<sup>41</sup> A reference to an image of the *Galaktotrophousa* by Chorikos of Gaza in the sixth-century urban church of St Stephen in Gaza suggests, however, that this was not strictly an Egyptian or monastic phenomenon. See *Laudatio Marciani* I, 29 (translation: Mango 1972, 62); Immerzeel 2016, 100.

<sup>42</sup> Saqqara: Quibell 1908, 81–82 (Pls 40–43); *idem* 1912, 19 (never photographed) and 23 (Pl. 22). Bawit: Maspero 1931, 37–38 (Pls 42–45); Clédar 1904, 517–526 (Pl. 1).

<sup>43</sup> Maspero 1931, 37–38 (Pls 42–45).

<sup>44</sup> Quibell 1908, 81–82 (Pls 40–43); *idem* 1912, 19 (never photographed) and 23 (Pl. 22); Clédar 1904, 517–526 (Pl. 1).

<sup>45</sup> Louth 2013, 83–84.

<sup>46</sup> Bolman 2016, 139–146.

<sup>47</sup> Salome only appears alongside Mary in one other instance in the extant Egyptian art for the period in question, namely Chapel L1 at Bawit. For Salome, see van Loon 2006.



Pl. 5. *Galaktotrophousa*; Room 30, Monastery of Apa Apollo, Bawit (Maspero 1931, Pl. 43).



Pl. 6. *Galaktotrophousa*; Cell A, Monastery of Apa Jeremiah at Saqqara (Quibell 1908, Pl. 41).



Pl. 7. *Galaktotrophousa*; North triconch, Church of Anba Bishay, Sohag (Evans/Ratliff 2012, Fig. 28).



Despite the obvious difference in place and composition, in every instance the physical act of nursing is downplayed as much as possible. Mary is always fully-clothed except for a single exposed breast, which is highly stylized and often barely visible; her virginity and modesty are highlighted even in this aspect of her iconography<sup>48</sup>.

The Christological implications of these paintings are contrasted with another potential iconographic variant to emerge in the sixth and seventh centuries – that is, the Enthroned Virgin without Child. A discussion of this iconography is rendered difficult, however, by the complete lack of surviving pictorial evidence associated with this type. Instead, we rely entirely on descriptions provided by two early twentieth-century excavation reports, which possibly record two such images. The first stems from Chapel VIII at the Monastery of Apa Apollo in Bawit, but its fragmented state left Clédât unable to discern whether it depicted the Virgin or Christ<sup>49</sup>. The second painting hails from a niche in Cell 1724 at the Monastery of Apa Jeremiah at Saqqara, of which only the figure of the Virgin, Enoch and Jeremiah, and the two archangels on the outer sides could be distinguished<sup>50</sup>. While the classification of these images as a separate iconographic category is tangential and depends entirely on the descriptions of already fragmentary images, they nevertheless raise interesting questions pertaining to the perceived function of such images. By appearing without the

Child (or adult Christ), Mary would no longer assume her Christological role as Theotokos, but rather becomes an intercessor for the Christian community. The absence of Christ permits the viewer to interact directly with Mary, allowing for an increasingly personal relationship with her.

As the tendency to portray Mary becomes more prolific in the sixth and seventh centuries, so too does her inclusion in the narrative friezes that abound the walls of churches and monasteries<sup>51</sup>. While several of the individual themes within these narrative scenes certainly appear in earlier contexts, such as the Annunciation, the long-form narrative component, and Mary's inclusion in it, marks a distinct first within the corpus of Marian art. These cycles, however, are particularly difficult to characterize, as they draw from both the canonical and apocryphal gospels – especially the *Protevangelium of James* – and the friezes are inconsistent in their organization. Thus, we must rely on their overall arrangement to determine the central theme of the story in question. Nevertheless, narrative friezes featuring the Virgin generally fall under one of two categories: cycles of the Infancy of Christ or the Life of Mary<sup>52</sup>. The former is best exemplified by the fragmented remains of a narrative frieze on the south wall of the nave of a church at Karm al-Ahbariyya. This cycle, which is dated to the second half of the sixth century, depicts the Annunciation, Visitation (or Ordeal of the Bitter Water?), Adoration of the Magi, Massacre of the Innocents, and Flight into Egypt<sup>53</sup>. The figure of Mary is seemingly repeated three times within the frieze. Beginning on the left, we see the head of the Virgin in an Annunciation scene, followed by an enthroned figure, perhaps Mary, which may correlate with the Adoration of the Magi, and towards the end of the sequence, Mary sits on the back of a donkey during the Flight into Egypt<sup>54</sup>.

At the Monastery of Apa Apollo at Bawit, a similar cycle of the Life of Christ appears on the north wall of Room 7 in Building 1, a space which is typically identified as part of a hostel complex. This frieze likely begins with the Annunciation and Visitation, although these images are now lost, followed by the extant section which illustrates the Apparition to Joseph, Voyage to Bethlehem (only the feet of the Virgin, who sits on the back of the donkey, are preserved), Nativity (Virgin reclines on a couch), Presentation in the Temple, and the Adoration of the Magi (Virgin is enthroned with Child at the far right)<sup>55</sup>. Several of the same images, however, are

<sup>48</sup> For an overview on the scholarship pertaining to the *Galaktotrophousa* and the incorrect notion of cultic continuity with the goddess Isis, see Tram Tam Tinh 1973; Higgins 2012; Immerzeel 2016, 97-101.

<sup>49</sup> Clédât 1904/1906, 49-52. Unfortunately, this painting was never photographed, preventing further analysis. See also Walters 1974, 124, who refers only to the Virgin.

<sup>50</sup> Quibell 1912, 23; Walters 1974, 124.

<sup>51</sup> The fifth/sixth-century decoration from the Chapel of Peace in the Kharga Oasis is excluded from the category of narrative cycles, as the individual scenes represent piecemeal images from both the Old and New Testament without consideration of a specific chronological or thematic arrangement.

<sup>52</sup> Van Loon 2016, 269-273.

<sup>53</sup> Witte-Orr 2010, 28-45 (Fig. 25).

<sup>54</sup> For a discussion of the enthroned figure, see Witte-Orr 2010, 36-37.

<sup>55</sup> Rutschowskaya 2010, 46-47 (Figs II.A-C and III.A-B); van Loon 2016, 269-272. Two additional cycles are known from the Monastery of Apa Apollo at Bawit: Room 18, and Chapel XXX, although neither preserves an image of the Virgin.

used to convey a completely different narrative – that is, the Life of Mary – on the north wall of Chapel LI, a community oratory and/or reception room, at the same monastery (Pls 8-10)<sup>56</sup>. Here, we again encounter the Annunciation and Visitation, which are then followed by the Journey to Bethlehem and the Virgin with the midwife Salome, the latter of which probably draws inspiration from the *Protevangelium*<sup>57</sup>. The emphasis laid on the Virgin, its use of apocryphal stories, and the focus on the pre-partum narratives distinguishes this particular cycle from those in Room 7 and at Karm al-Ahbariyya, which highlight Christ as their principal character and draw chiefly from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke<sup>58</sup>. Despite the diverging textual inspirations and the narrative focuses of the friezes, all illustrate sequential events that were well-understood and recognized by the individuals who might enter the communal spaces in which they were located.

In addition to the aforementioned examples, a fourth narrative frieze survives in the narthex of the quarry church at Deir Abu Hinnis. These paintings, which are generally dated to the sixth to eighth centuries, are spread out across at least two walls of the narthex (north and east)<sup>59</sup>. They begin with the Massacre of the Innocents, and are followed by the supplication of Zacharias, Gabriel's apparition to Joseph and the Flight of the Holy Family into Egypt<sup>60</sup>. Mary appears exclusively in the final scene. Here, she and the infant Jesus flee Bethlehem on the back of a donkey, as Joseph walks behind them<sup>61</sup>. Initially, this frieze was identified as the Infancy of Christ, although recent scholarship has noted that it rather represents a cycle of the life of John the Baptist, to whom the church was dedicated<sup>62</sup>. While such a cycle is unusual in the corpus of Christian art in Egypt, Mary's inclusion in this narrative is not surprising, as the lives of John the Baptist and Christ are intimately interconnected.

The diversity of the compositions in which Mary appears is further reflected in the diverging spaces that each occupies within its structural environs, although it must be noted that all are preserved in monastic contexts. Of those discussed, only the Infancy cycle at Karm al-Ahbariyya is located within the nave of a church, representing the lone instance in which such a narrative is preserved within a liturgical space in Egypt. The remaining friezes are situated in rooms with non-liturgical functions to which a broad spectrum of individuals could be admitted, including the narthex or visitor's room of

the subterranean church at Deir Abu Hinnis, as well as the community oratory and/or reception room (Chapel LI) and hostel complex (Room 7) at Bawit, spaces that allowed for the creation of a visual culture that offered both instruction and opportunities for contemplation<sup>63</sup>.

The sixth and seventh centuries, therefore, represent a period of creativity within the developing visual culture, in which artists could explore different ways to render the Virgin. This is further illustrated by several murals that are not bound to iconographic classification, as they display significant diversity in both style and overall composition; these images are categorized here as Miscellaneous Marian Themes. The first of these paintings is a depiction of the Wedding at Cana from Deir Abu Hinnis, which is broadly dated to the sixth to eighth centuries<sup>64</sup>. In this image, Mary acts as a witness to the

<sup>56</sup> Clédât 1999, Pls 109-110 and 112-113.

<sup>57</sup> Clédât 1904, 523-525; *idem* 1999, 110-114; van Loon 2006; *eadem* 2016, 269-273. This particular frieze is generally dated to the sixth to seventh centuries, although a later date (eighth/ninth) cannot be completely excluded. For a discussion pertaining to the dates, see van Loon 2006, 85, n. 15.

<sup>58</sup> Note that the first three scenes (Annunciation, Visitation and Voyage to Bethlehem) could be inspired by either Luke 1:26-56 or the *Protevangelium of James*, while the fourth is apocryphal and appears most prominently in the *Protevangelium of James*.

<sup>59</sup> Van Loon 2016, 260, notes that recent studies prefer a date towards the first half of this period.

<sup>60</sup> Clédât 1902, Pls 1-2. The Christological frieze appears in Room 1 (walls 1 and 2) of the subterranean church, although figurative scenes are also present on the walls of the other rooms. The damage to these paintings, however, hinders any definitive interpretation of their scenes. At present, it appears as though some of the figurative paintings from Room 2 are also taken from the Gospel narratives (especially walls 8 and 9), whereas the paintings from Room 3 derive from the apocrypha. While there is a clear development of a Christological narrative on walls 1 and 2, it is unclear where and when this narrative is picked up again in another room, if at all. For this discussion, see Clédât 1902, 48. Cf. de Bock 1901, 84 (Pl. 33), who gives a reproduction of parts of walls 1 and 2 but does not thoroughly discuss the paintings.

<sup>61</sup> Van Loon/Delattre 2006, 119-134. For a discussion of the Flight into Egypt, see Bishop Gregorios 1991, 1117-1118.

<sup>62</sup> See van Loon 2016, who identifies this cycle as the Life of John the Baptist based on its unusual choice to begin the cycle with the Massacre of the Innocents and its inclusion in a church dedicated to this saint.

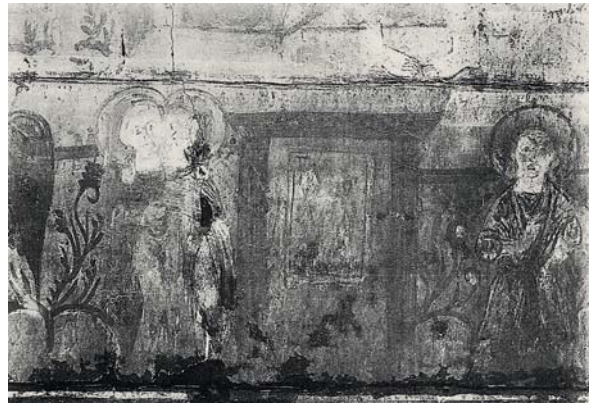
<sup>63</sup> Van Loon 2016, 272.

<sup>64</sup> Clédât 1902, 52-53 (Pl. 3); van Loon/Delattre 2006, 119-124; van Loon 2016, 257-279.





*Pl. 8. Annunciation; Chapel LI, Monastery of Apa Apollo at Bawit (Clédat 1999, Pl. 109).*



*Pl. 9. Cycle with Mary; Chapel 51, The Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth, Monastery of Apa Apollo at Bawit (Clédat 1999, Pl. 110).*



*Pl. 10. Cycle with Mary; Chapel 51, The Flight of the Holy Family into Egypt, Monastery of Apa Apollo at Bawit (Clédat 1999, Pl. 112).*

Wedding at Cana, standing at the outer left edge of the composition, as Christ (to her proper left) changes water into wine. Three additional figures participate in the event, including a woman on the far right. While such a theme is not unique to the corpus of Egyptian art, it represents the only known image in which the figure of Mary is preserved<sup>65</sup>.

Aside from the painting at Deir Abu Hinnis, there are two more examples from the sixth and seventh centuries which are not subject to further classification. The first stems from the east wall of the south oratory in hermitage number four at Esna, notably in a panel to the proper left of the oratory niche. In this image, Mary appears in bust form with the Child, flanked by two angels, none of whom are encased in medallions, as we would expect<sup>66</sup>. The second painting comes from Cell 1740 at Saqqara and is only mentioned in passing by Quibell, who describes the image simply as ‘the figure of Our Lord and the head of the Virgin’<sup>67</sup>. The arrangement of the two individuals is unclear from his vague description, but we can extrapolate that he is referring to Jesus in adult form, as he always refers to Him as ‘Child’ when depicted as an infant<sup>68</sup>.

The diversity in composition and theme within these paintings reflects a wider trend that emerges throughout the sixth and seventh centuries, the exploration of the available source material (for example, the canonical gospels, apocryphal texts and existing iconographies) to create a distinct visual culture of the Virgin Mary. This period marks a time of extraordinary profusion of Marian imagery, in which specific ideas and iconographic components begin to emerge and which will be expounded and elaborated upon in the centuries to follow. Nevertheless, we continue to encounter the visual translations of biblical narratives in this period, although there is a definitive shift towards highlighting Mary’s Christological function, particularly in her portrayal as enthroned with Child. It is also a time when Mary becomes a subject of interest in her own right (for example, the pre-partum narrative), a trend which is proliferated in the following centuries.

#### THE EIGHTH AND NINTH CENTURIES: DIVERSIFICATION AND ELABORATION

While there was a concerted effort to create and develop distinct Marian iconographies in the sixth and seventh centuries, the eighth and ninth centuries are characterized by the elaboration of these

images into increasingly formulaic renderings, which would shape the way in which they were translated into the visual culture of the medieval period. Moreover, there is also a greater trend towards the more prominent incorporation of Mary into the iconographic programmes of monastic and non-monastic churches, finding prominence of place within the overall decorative scheme – that is, the more prolific inclusion of Mary within the nave of the church<sup>69</sup>. This development is particularly well-illustrated through an analysis of the iconographic programme of the Church of the Theotokos at Deir al-Surian, formerly known as the Monastery of the Holy Virgin of Deir Anba Bishoi, in the Wadi al-Natrun. The monastery was founded in the sixth century after a theological dispute over the human nature of Christ – and, thereby, the recognition of Mary as his bodily mother – split the monastic community at Deir Anba Bishoi in two. Those who subscribed to the Orthodox view left the monastery and founded a new community nearby. To underscore the theological convictions that led to the establishment of this new settlement, both the church and monastery were dedicated to the Virgin Mary<sup>70</sup>. Thus, given the historical context within which this monastery came to exist, it is unsurprising that images of the Virgin materialize on several progressive layers of the nave in the monastic church. The earliest of these is a painting of the *Galaktotrophousa*, which appears on a half-column in the *khurus* and dates to ca. 700 (Pl. 11)<sup>71</sup>. The position of this image is exceptional, as it occupies the space in which we would traditionally expect to

<sup>65</sup> Paintings of the wedding at Cana have been identified at Karm al-Ahbariya, on which see Witte-Orr 2010 (47-50). and at Bawit, see Clédat 1916, 6-7 (Fig. 4). At present, the sixth-century Rabbula Gospels denote the earliest instance in which the Virgin is depicted as part of the Wedding at Cana, see Khalek 2012, 67-68.

<sup>66</sup> Sauneron/Jacquet 1972, 1.80-81 (Pl. 30c); and Boutros in Gabra/Takla 2010, 197-198, who describes the flanking angels as the Seraphim (p. 190).

<sup>67</sup> Quibell 1912, 21.

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Quibell 1908, 64 (Pl. 41), where he discusses a painting of the Virgin and Child.

<sup>69</sup> Prior to the eighth century, Mary appears in the nave in two instances: the *Galaktotrophousa* in the north triconch at the Church of Anba Bishay (Sohag) and the cycle of John the Baptist at Deir Abu Hinnis.

<sup>70</sup> Innemée 2016, 1.

<sup>71</sup> This painting is found on layer two, on which see Innemée 2016, 7. For an overview of the wall paintings at Deir al Surian, see Immerzeel 2017, 100-109.





*Pl. 11. Galaktotrophousa; Half-column in entrance to Haykal, Deir al-Surian, Wadi Natrun (Deir al-Surian Conservation Project).*



*Pl. 12. Cycle with Mary: Epiphany, North Semi-Dome of Khurus; Deir al-Surian, Wadi el-Natrun (Deir al-Surian Conservation Project).*



*Pl. 13. Annunciation; Western Semi-Dome, Deir el-Surian, Wadi el-Natrun (Deir al-Surian Conservation Project).*

find a painting or icon of Christ – that is, to the right of the entrance to the *haykal*. More importantly, however, this *khurus* might also have been the original *haykal* of the church – as part of a trilobed sanctuary similar to that at Sohag – perhaps directly linking the image with the altar<sup>72</sup>.

After the completion of the *Galaktotrophousa*, at least two additional representations of the Virgin were added to the decorative programme of the church. These images, which are likely dated to the eighth century, include an Epiphany (Pl. 12) in the northern semi-dome of the *khurus* and an Annunciation (Pl. 13) in the western return aisle of the nave<sup>73</sup>. The two paintings appear to be part of a larger cycle, or series of feasts, that would have extended to southern semi-dome of the *khurus* and perhaps the eastern conch of the church, although the existence of this conch remains speculative<sup>74</sup>. The theorized eastern conch would have likely contained an Ascension scene, so it follows that the Pentecost would have followed on the southern semi-dome. If these estimations are indeed correct, the church at Deir al-Surian probably contained a complete Christological cycle from conception to resurrection in which Mary featured prominently. Such a programme is markedly different from the friezes that first manifested in the sixth and seventh centuries, as we transition from a narrative conceptualization of the Infancy (i.e. Bawit and Karm al-Ahbariyya) to the visualization of the liturgy. Most importantly, we note the attempt to draw connections between ritual and space, tying the physical performance of the liturgy with the iconography of the respective semi-domes<sup>75</sup>.

A further example of the diversification of Marian iconography is epitomized by an eighth- or ninth-century mural on the eastern wall of Chapel LIX at Bawit. Here, a centrally enthroned adult Christ (left), who holds a book in his lap with his left hand and gives the sign of benediction with his right, sits next to Mary (right), and they are flanked by ten individuals. The pair are enthroned on an elevated platform, along with two seated figures immediately to Christ's proper left. The other eight individuals, however, are standing<sup>76</sup>. In this painting, Mary and Christ are treated as equals: both are enthroned and occupy a central position, while they are also rendered at a nearly identical height. This image also represents the first instance in which the adult Christ and Mary are depicted in the same plane – outside of a strictly biblical context (as, for example, in the

Wedding at Cana from Deir Abu Hinnis)<sup>77</sup>. All other occurrences of the adult Christ and Mary are limited to double compositions, in which the figure of Christ is restricted to the upper zone, implying a cosmological separation between them – Christ in heaven and Mary on earth.

Thus, the eighth and ninth centuries mark the point at which the earlier themes are solidified and expounded, while also leaving room for continued diversification, especially as the Virgin's Christological function becomes increasingly pronounced in the visual culture of Christian Egypt. We also see a notable increase in Mary's broader incorporation into the iconographical programmes of larger churches, which begins in the sixth century, but is epitomized by Mary's prominent inclusion in the decorative scheme at Deir al-Surian. While we must reflect on the theological disputes that ultimately led to the foundation of Deir al-Surian, and informed its

<sup>72</sup> Innemée 2016, 1-2.

<sup>73</sup> From an archaeological perspective, the paintings are no more precisely dated than the eighth to twelfth centuries. See Innemée 2000, 253; and Innemée/Van Rompay 2002, 246, who note the presence of drops of encaustic paint on the paintings beneath the dome, which belong to the second layer of painting in the church. This suggests that the dome was painted after the walls (perhaps mid-eighth century) and the cycle was over-painted in the thirteenth century, providing a *terminus ante quem*. The epigraphical evidence points to a much earlier date for the appearance of the paintings. See Innemée 2003, 4-5, who notes a Syriac inscription on the north wall which bears a date of 818/819, so that the second layer was likely painted before 818/819. Inscriptions on layer 2, moreover, are in Coptic, which suggests that the paintings were applied well before the arrival of Syrian monks in the monastery, which is commemorated in the inscription of 818/819.

<sup>74</sup> Innemée 1995, 129-132; Innemée 2016, 3. Innemée has argued that the original *khurus* took the shape of a triconch and that the present form of the *haykal* was not part of the original construction. The notion that the extant scenes form a cycle, or a series of feasts, rests upon the presence of a thirteenth-century cycle that overlies these earlier paintings. A similar thirteenth-century cycle was found at Deir al-Baramus in the Wadi al-Natrun, on which see van Moorsel 1991; van Loon/Immerzeel 1998, 10-13; Immerzeel 2017, 33-38.

<sup>75</sup> Spieser 1998, 63; Louth 2013, 87-88.

<sup>76</sup> Clédat 1999, 175-176 (Pls 154-155 and 158). This composition is attributed stylistically to the eighth or ninth centuries, based on the delicate treatment of the figures (especially the faces and drapery), although it also retains the typical frontal and distant pose that is common in the sixth and seventh centuries.

<sup>77</sup> The image in Cell 1740 at Saqqara might be an exception, but it is no longer preserved and was never photographed.

emphasis on Marian iconography, this period nevertheless sets the stage for the further inclusion of Marian iconography in the centuries to follow, when it becomes firmly incorporated into the standard decorative schemes of Egyptian churches<sup>78</sup>.

#### THE TENTH CENTURY: TOWARDS MONUMENTALITY

As we end our discussion in the tenth century, we note that there is a greater propensity to illustrate scenes from the life of the Virgin within Egyptian churches. This period also marks the first instance in which the liturgy pertaining to the death of the Virgin is visualized within the extant wall paintings, reflecting the emerging importance of this theme within the artistic canon of Egyptian church decoration. This is best exemplified by a sequence of tenth-century paintings from Deir al-Surian, which illustrate her Dormition and, in all likelihood, Assumption<sup>79</sup>. The series was found on the eastern wall of the *khurus* and is divided into three separate scenes. At the far left, we encounter a representation of the Dormition – perhaps one of the earliest extant examples of this theme – in which the Virgin is lying on a bed, surrounded by the twelve apostles and six women (three on either side), the latter of whom are swinging censers – a role typically reserved for men. A large winged figure stands behind the bed, likely the archangel Michael, with his arms stretched out, as if to receive the soul of the Virgin<sup>80</sup>. The uniqueness of the first image extends to the central scene, for which there is no analogous representation in the contemporary corpus of Christian art. Here, the Virgin sits to the proper right of Christ, both enthroned, as he raises her left arm in a gesture of triumph<sup>81</sup>. As such, we may interpret this painting as the reunification of

the Virgin's body and soul in heaven and its reception by Christ. The sequence concludes on the far right with a scene that is largely missing. The surviving elements, however, suggest that it once illustrated the Assumption of the Virgin, particularly the group of men who look up in wonder, as well as a partial Coptic inscription, which reads: 'The body of ...'.

In addition to the novel depictions of the Virgin in the *khurus* at Deir al-Surian, a double composition was added to the east wall of the nave. This image belongs to a set of commemorative paintings for Abbot Maqari from Taqrit (died 889), which spread out across the south-east corner of the church – an area which was apparently redesigned as a commemorative chapel<sup>82</sup>. In this painting, we find Christ in the upper zone, surrounded by the four creatures of the apocalypse, while the lower tier depicts an enthroned Mary with Child, flanked by the apostles Peter and Paul. While this particular composition generally adheres to the earlier renderings of the iconography, a unique variant of this theme is found in a rock-hewn cave complex near Deir Abu Makar. This painting, the last in our discussion, was found on the east wall of what was likely a prayer room. Here, the typically stratified composition deviates from the traditional scheme and appears instead on a single plane, probably on account of the low ceiling. It preserves a fragmentary image of Christ in Majesty, surrounded by the four creatures of the apocalypse on the right, followed by a representation of the *Galaktotrophousa* between two archangels to His left. An inscription dates the decoration of the cave to A.M. 660, that is, 943/44<sup>83</sup>.

#### CONCLUSION

While the surviving 52 representations of Mary represent only a fraction of the number of paintings that would have adorned the walls of structures across Egypt until the mid-tenth century, they nevertheless facilitate a discussion of the expression and development of Marian iconography. At the outset, depictions of Mary are limited to her role within New Testament narratives (for example, the third-century painting of the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes from Kom el-Shoqafa). It was only the declaration of Mary as Theotokos at the Council of Ephesus that provided the impetus for the development of Marian iconographies which looked beyond simple iterations of gospel themes. While

<sup>78</sup> See e.g. van Loon 2010, 226; Dekker 2013c, 128; Kupe-  
lian 2013, 203-206.

<sup>79</sup> Innemée 2016, 25 and 30-32.

<sup>80</sup> Innemée/Youssef 2007, 70-71; Innemée 2016, 30. This is  
an unusual iconographic detail as the position of the arch-  
angel in this scene is usually held by Christ.

<sup>81</sup> Rondot 2013, 122-125. Iconographic parallels for this type  
of imagery exist in Egypt, particularly on a panel painting  
from Tebtynis, which depicts two seated deities in a similar  
fashion.

<sup>82</sup> Deir al-Surian Conservation Project 2016; Immerzeel 2017,  
25, 103-104; Innemée/Ochała/Van Rompay 2015.

<sup>83</sup> Immerzeel 2016, 98, Figs 3-4; *idem* 2017, 46, Fig. 10,  
Pls 9-10; van der Vliet 2009, 335-336.



these narratives are by no means absent from the later Marian iconography, they do appear in notably different forms (for instance, the Wedding at Cana at Deir Abu Hinnis).

It is not until the sixth and seventh centuries, however, that artists began to earnestly generate an ever-expanding artistic database, which specifically explores Mary's role as Theotokos within the Christological framework – particularly, the propensity to illustrate Mary as an enthroned Virgin with Child. This diachronic gap suggests that it took some time for the Mariology expounded at the Council of Ephesus to manifest itself in a distinct visual culture for Mary. Moreover, the extant evidence suggests that monastic communities played an essential role in its development, as the impetus appears to stem mostly from monastic cells – although we must also consider the extent to which this is simply a matter of the bias of preservation. From the eighth century onwards, there is a notable diversification and elaboration of Marian iconography, and an interest in its incorporation within the larger iconographic programs of churches, culminating in the widespread inclusion of the Virgin in the decoration of the nave in the tenth century.

Finally, the wealth of information that derives from a chronological analysis of Marian wall paintings provides clear direction and opportunities for future studies, particularly analyses which would investigate the development of Marian iconography across a variety of other media, including illuminated manuscripts, liturgical equipment and the small arts. Such studies would nuance the picture that emerges from an investigation of these paintings, further interrogating the point at which the visual culture associated with the Virgin Mary coalesced, the current evidence for which suggests that it occurred only in the sixth and seventh centuries.

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## *Hidden in a Cave: The Tradition of the Prophet Elijah and Interreligious Convergences in the Damascus Area\**

Mat IMMERZEEL

*To Albert Caméo, chairman of the Jewish Community in Damascus and guardian of the Eliyanu Hanabi Synagogue in Jobar, and his sister Rachel*

*Le pèlerin est tout réjoui d'apprendre que Saïdnaya est l'emplacement authentique du paradis terrestre. Ici Caïn et Abel ont vécu, ont sacrifié à Dieu; ici Caïn tua son frère. Ici l'arche s'est arrêtée après le déluge; ici le patriarche Noé planta la première vigne. Ici Abraham conduisit Isaac pour l'immoler au Seigneur. C'est presque toute la Genèse déroulant ses gracieux récits auteur du saint rocher<sup>1</sup>.*

This colourful description by Father Joseph Goudard in 1907 concerns the Greek Orthodox (Melkite) Monastery of Our Lady in Saydnaya in the Qalamun region to the north of Damascus (Fig. 1), famous for its miraculous icon of the Virgin and from way back one of the most prominent attractions for pilgrims to the Middle East<sup>2</sup>. Judging from the many written or orally transmitted stories, the monastery was indeed situated in a tangible biblical landscape. Yet in this respect the Qalamun is far from unique: the Middle East is rich in ancient buildings, caves and mountain peaks with a story derived from the Bible or the lives of the saints. Together these holy places constitute the landmarks and meeting points in the comprehensible though geographically limited world of the various population groups that inhabit this area in close proximity.

None of these religious landscapes would be complete without the presence of the Prophet Elijah, in particular the cave where he hid from the troops of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 19:15) after he had murdered 450 rival Baal priests (1 Kings 18:1-40). Elijah has always played a prominent role in the three monotheistic religions. The Muslims identify him with the enigmatic figure al-Khidr ('the Green One'), who is simultaneously the alter ego of Christian saints such as George and Behnam<sup>3</sup>. Over the ages, the Middle East numbered several grottoes claimed to be Elijah's hiding place, with the Cave of

Elijah on Mount Carmel as probably the best known instance<sup>4</sup>. Josef Meri lists an impressive number of similar focal points in the popular cult of Elijah and al-Khidr in Jewish and Muslim circles from the twelfth century onwards, especially in and near Damascus<sup>5</sup>. From way back, the Damascene Jews venerated their own 'Cave of Elijah' below the synagogue of Jobar near the Syrian capital. And yet more sites can be added to Meri's overview, especially Christian ones, such as the cave below the church of the former Monastery of St Elijah (Deir Mar Elias Btina) in Beirut<sup>6</sup>, and the Cave of St Elijah (Mar Elias) near Saydnaya (Fig. 1). This article focuses on the latter site and its Jewish counterpart at Jobar and highlights the historical sources, in particular travellers' accounts, on these sanctuaries in the Damascus area. At the same time, it examines the claims that these places functioned as centres of interreligious convergences. A number of illustrative historical sources are included in an appendix, though this does not pretend to be complete.

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<sup>1</sup> Goudard 1908, 471.

<sup>2</sup> Recent studies on Saydnaya and its cult include: Hamilton 2000; Kedar 2001; Bacci 2006; Hêlou/Slim *et al.* 2007, 116-147; Immerzeel 2007; *idem* 2009a, 43-49; *idem* 2009b.

<sup>3</sup> For al-Khidr, see Wolper 2011, with further references.

<sup>4</sup> Pringle 1998, 226-229, no. 203.

<sup>5</sup> Meri 1999a; *idem* 1999b.

<sup>6</sup> Hêlou/Slim *et al.* 2007, 196-205. For the thirteenth-century wall paintings in this church, which include Elijah fed by the Ravens and his Ascension, see Chmielewski/Waliszewski 2014.



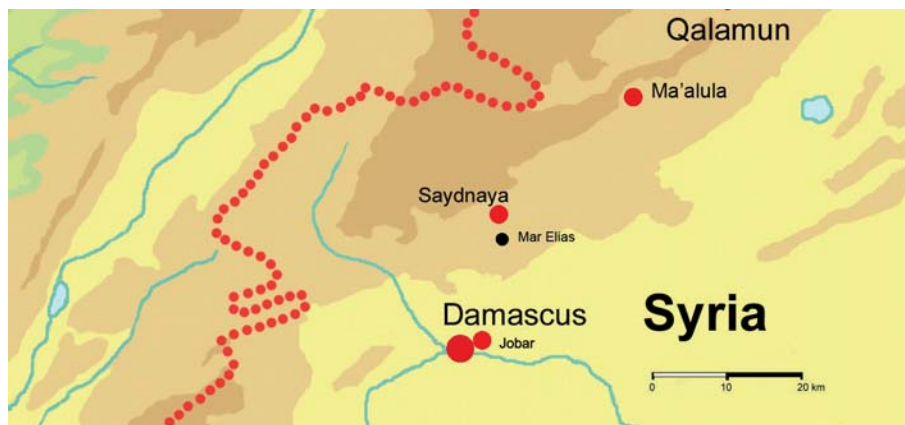


Fig. 1. Map of Damascus and the Qalamun (drawing Mat Immerzeel).

### THE SYNAGOGUE OF JOBAR

Situated within a short distance of Bab Tuma (Thomas Gate), the former village of Jobar has now been completely absorbed by the Damascene suburbs to the north-east of the old city. Its Eliyanu Hanabi Synagogue is hardly recognizable as such, hidden as it is behind the façades of a common Damascene street. The inner court of the synagogue is accessed through a small doorway from the street, and from there one enters the house of prayer (Pls 1-6). The present building must have been erected, or renovated, around the mid-seventeenth century, but the place is certainly much older. The synagogue's history and architecture have not yet been the subject of systematic analysis, but valuable information can be found in the accounts of mainly European Jewish and Christian visitors to the Middle East.

Tradition extends the construction right back to the prophet. In the Talmud, there is mention of a synagogue of Abi Gubar, though without any further specification<sup>7</sup>. For fact, the building's written history commences in the late twelfth century, when Rabbi Pethachia from Regensburg – on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1178 – wrote about

a Damascene synagogue built by Elijah himself (Text 1). Shortly later, Samuel ben Samson located this sanctuary outside the city walls (Text 2), while Rabbi Jacob attributed its construction to Rabbi Eleazar ben Arakh, whose name would turn up again in later accounts (Texts 7, 19).

Taken together, the textual sources provide some fine pieces of a puzzle that is not yet complete. Whereas some references contain minimal information, others furnish essential details of the synagogue's tradition, architecture, and refurbishment. A particularly intriguing description is that of the Flemish nobleman Joos van Ghistele, who visited Syria in 1481, and whose notes were compiled and published by Ambrosius Zeebout in 1557<sup>8</sup>. Since this account is only available in its original sixteenth-century Dutch version, the passage about Jobar has escaped the attention of scholars so far (Text 6)<sup>9</sup>. With his remarkable taste of details, van Ghistele was well ahead of his time<sup>10</sup>. Some forty years after van Ghistele's stay in the Syrian capital, Rabbi Moses Bassola d'Ancona noted the 'six columns on the right and seven on the left' (Text 7). Actually both authors describe an interior that echoes the present situation, which leads us to conclude that the renovations – perhaps executed after the visit of Samuel ben David in 1641/42, who speaks of 'an ancient synagogue' (Text 11) – did not profoundly change the layout of the building. The present colonnades resting on shallow piers and columns constitute a local Ottoman model. Some columns consist of antique spoils, and one imagines that these were taken either from the original construction, or a Roman building in the area (Pls 1-2)<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Berakoth III; Lewis 1938, 183 n. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Zeebout 2006.

<sup>9</sup> The translation is my own and should be regarded as provisional.

<sup>10</sup> For the value of van Ghistele's account for the building history of the church in the monastery of Saydnaya, see Immerzeel 2009a, 46.

<sup>11</sup> For a brief description of the synagogue, see Gruber [n.y.].



Pl. 1. Interior of the Synagogue of Jobar (web).



Pl. 2. Synagogue of Jobar: reused column and capital (photograph Mat Immerzeel).



Pl. 3. Synagogue of Jobar: the Cave of Elijah (photograph Mat Immerzeel).



Pl. 4. Synagogue of Jobar, Cave of Elijah: cross vault (photograph Mat Immerzeel).



Pl. 5. Synagogue of Jobar: the place of anointments (photograph Mat Immerzeel).



Pl. 6. Synagogue of Jobar: slab commemorating the place of anointments (photograph Mat Immerzeel).



The focal point in the synagogue is Elijah's sheltering cave, a more or less square chamber situated below the *hechal*, that is, the niche or cupboard in which the Thora scrolls are kept. The cave is accessible via a flight of stairs in a space at the right hand side. It measures approximately 4 × 4 m and has a cross vault that already existed in van Ghistele's days (Text 6). There is a niche in each of the three remaining walls, where lamps burn (Pls 3-4). A hole in the vault is said to have allowed the ravens to enter the cave and bring the prophet some bread (Text 12). This place, too, does not seem to have changed over the centuries. Today's visitors descend the stairs chanting a threefold 'pardon', light candles, make a wish and pray, and leave the cave walking backwards. As Samuel ben David also mentions the making of a wish, this ritual custom seem to be of a respectable age (Text 11).

In the written and oral traditions, the synagogue is said to have been the scene of Elijah's deeds in Damascus; here, he found shelter and anointed Elisha his successor and Hazael King of Syria. Several authors link these events to the cave, but reports from the nineteenth century refer to a railed off space at the entrance demarcating the place of the anointments (Texts 19-21). Benjamin II describes 'an irregularly formed stone, on which can be observed the traces of several steps' (Text 19). It must have been there for a long time as Moses Bassola also refers to a stone (1522; Text 7). In the late nineteenth century or first half of the twentieth century, it was replaced by a modern monumental plaque with inscriptions in Hebrew, Arabic and French commemorating Elisha's anointment: "C'est ici, qu'en l'année 3043, de notre ère, fut oint le Prophète Elisha ben Chafat, par Eliahou Hanabi" (Pls 5-6).

In 1660 Laurent d'Arvieux found Jobar populated with Jews (Text 12), whereas the eighteenth-century account published under the names of Johannes Aegidius van Egmond and Johannes Heyman speaks of a mixed Jewish-Muslim population (Text 15). When Ulrich Jasper Seetzen visited Jobar in 1806, the village was entirely Muslim, or, as he suggests, had entirely converted to Islam (Text 18). Today the synagogue is a pilgrim's centre

for Jews from Damascus and beyond, but also attracts Christians and Muslims from over the world, who come here to pay honour to Elijah. Significantly, the Arab-speaking Damascene Jews also refer to the prophet by his Islamic name of al-Khidr (Text 23)<sup>12</sup>.

At the present day, the number of Jewish families in Syria's capital is reduced to about 100. Their community takes care of the synagogue of Jobar and the only remaining synagogue in the old city, called Keniset al-Frangiyye, to keep alive the memory of the enduring Jewish presence in Damascus.

It is striking that there is also a cave of al-Khidr near the Shrine of the Forty Martyrs, a Muslim sanctuary on the southern slope of Mount Qassiyun north of Damascus<sup>13</sup>. When Jean de Thévenot stayed in Damascus in 1658, he visited both Jobar (Text 14) and this cave. When he arrived at this spot, his guide told him the same story as he had heard at Jobar: it was the sheltering place of Elijah where the ravens fed him<sup>14</sup>. Unfortunately, de Thévenot's thoughts about this remarkable overlap have not come down to us.

#### THE CAVE CHURCH OF MAR ELIAS IN MA'ARRAT SAYDNAYA

The Cave Church of Mar Elias is situated within the territory of the village of Ma'arrat Saydnaya, at about 6 km from the Monastery of Our Lady in Saydnaya, on the edge of the plateau between the Anti-Lebanon mountains and the Plain of Damascus (Fig. 1). Local tradition has it that this was the place in the desert of Damascus where the prophet hid, where he anointed Elisha, and from where he ascended into heaven<sup>15</sup>. Although Saydnaya itself was visited and described by many European pilgrims from the twelfth century onward, they tended to overlook this remote sanctuary. The few reports on this site are fairly recent: the English traveller Richard Pococke came here in 1737, followed by Alfred von Kremer in 1850, and Clément Huart in the 1870s (Texts 24-26).

The name of the village is composed of 'Saydnaya' and the Aramaic word 'ma'arra', meaning 'cave', and undoubtedly relates to the Cave of Mar Elias. From time immemorial, this part of the Qalamun was a Melkite stronghold, but in 1724 the bishop of Saydnaya was one of the first adherents of the newly founded Greek (Rum) Catholic Church. Today most of Ma'arrat Saydnaya's inhabitants are

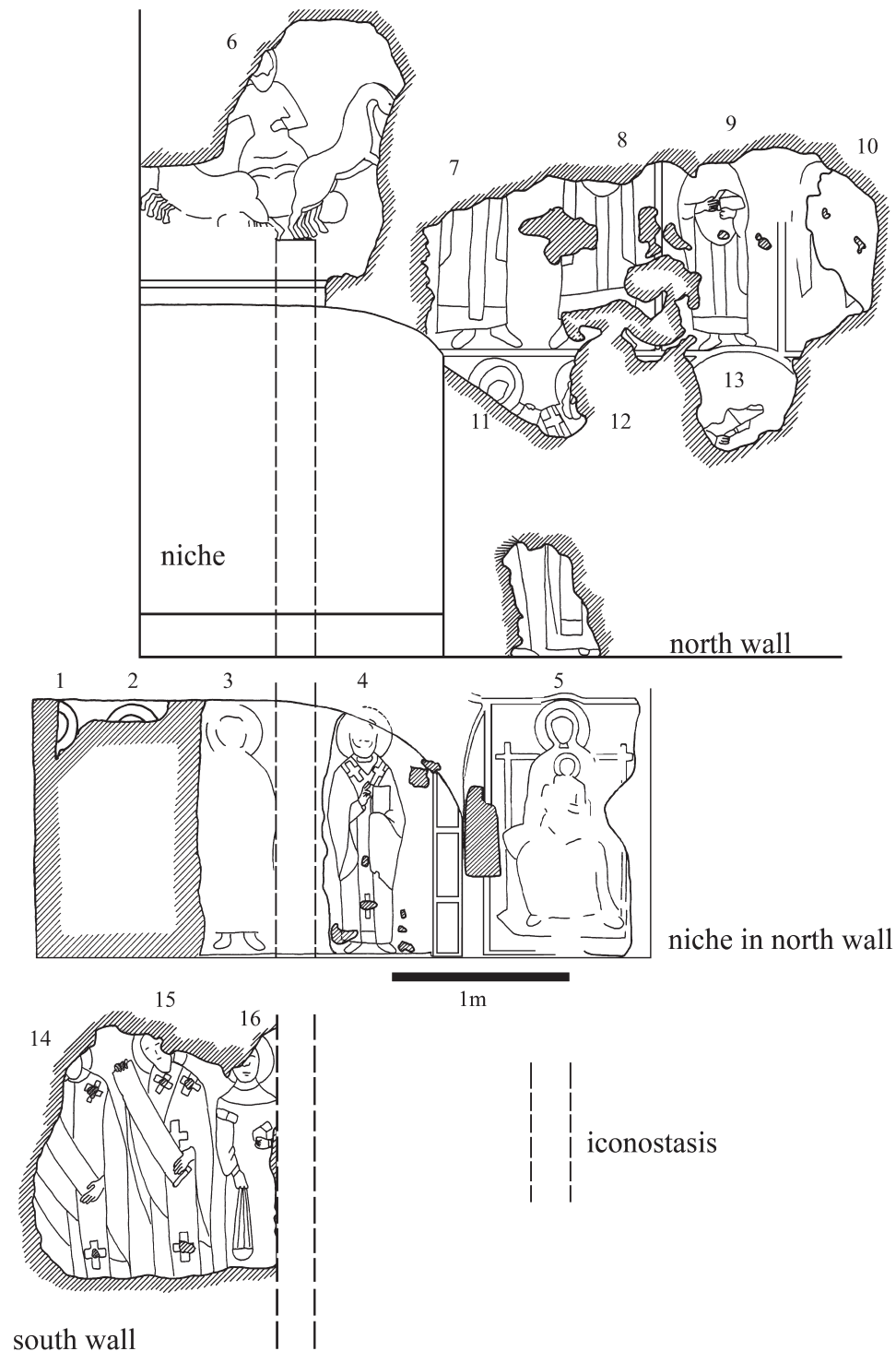
<sup>12</sup> Meri 1999a, 251-252.

<sup>13</sup> Meri 1999a, 254-255.

<sup>14</sup> De Thévenot 1727, 64.

<sup>15</sup> Alam 1995, 18.





- |                     |                          |                        |
|---------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Female saint     | 6. Ascension of Elijah   | 13. Bishop             |
| 2. St Demetrius     | 7-9. Anonymous saints    | 14. St Athanasius      |
| 3. St George        | 10. Virgin of the Deisis | 15. St John Chrysostom |
| 4. St Nicholas      | 11. Virgin               | 16. Deacon saint       |
| 5. Virgin Enthroned | 12. St Antipas           |                        |

Fig. 2. Church of Mar Elias, Ma'arrat Saydnaya: wall paintings (drawing Hiba al-Bashir and Mat Immerzeel).



Pl. 7. *Flight of stairs leading to the Church of Mar Elias, Ma'arrat Saydnaya (photograph Mat Immerzeel).*



Pl. 8. *The Church of Mar Elias, Ma'arrat Saydnaya (photograph Mat Immerzeel).*



Pl. 9. *Church of Mar Elias, Ma'arrat Saydnaya: Ascension of the Prophet Elijah (photograph Mat Immerzeel).*



Pl. 10. *Church of Mar Elias, Ma'arrat Saydnaya: wall paintings on the northern wall (photograph Mat Immerzeel).*

Greek Catholics, and to judge from Pococke's account this was already the case in 1737 (Text 24).

Huart describes the difficulties visitors experienced in descending the rocks to the sanctuary (Text 26). Today the danger has diminished through the construction of 198 concrete steps which lead down to the platform in front of the church built in 1897 (Pls 7-8). A large hole cut into the rock behind the altar and an exterior passage give access to a cave complex, believed to be a former hermitage affiliated to Saydnaya's monastery. It consists of a central cave serving as an oratory, a grotto immediately to the left of this church's western entrance, another cave at the end of a corridor on the east side, and a few separate caves at a higher level.

Partly preserved medieval wall paintings in the oratory testify to this room's liturgical function (Fig. 2). The earliest mural represents the Ascension

of Elijah and is estimated to date from the eleventh century (Pl. 9). Since this sanctuary is not mentioned before the eighteenth century, a link between this image and the church's dedication to this prophet must remain speculative, but seems probable. The second series of murals were applied roughly in the first half of the thirteenth century and are attributed to a Cypriot artist. To the extent of the poor state of preservation allows an analysis, the decorative programme consisted of a procession of officiating Church fathers with the Virgin and a deacon saint (Stephen?) painted around the altar, a Deesis at the east end of the sanctuary, and a number of frontally depicted saints on the north wall, of which three depictions survive (Pl. 10). Furthermore, a niche in the north wall contains the much deteriorated images of a female saint, St Demetrius, St George, a well-preserved St Nicholas, and the Virgin Enthroned with the Child. At a certain point

erosion caused the collapse of the roof and part of the south side. So that the church could still be used, a roof was constructed, supported by two arches, as well as a wall with windows in the south side. Some of the images were provisionally repainted probably at this occasion<sup>16</sup>.

In the present day, Mar Elias is frequented both by Muslims and Christians of all denominations<sup>17</sup>, and as in the case of Jobar, one wonders how old this interreligious tradition might be. For this, we turn our attention to the written sources not only on these two sites but also on the Monastery of Saydnaya.

#### INTERRELIGIOUS ENCOUNTERS

It should be noted that none of the sources on the synagogue of Jobar furnishes any clue regarding the presence of Muslims in this sanctuary. We are even more in the dark about the situation at Mar Elias's, but when von Kremer attended the celebrations of the feast-day of Elijah in 1850, he noticed Muslims among the participants (Text 25). More than a century earlier, Pococke had expressed concern about a possible takeover of the church by Muslims, but it is unclear whether this fear stemmed from their unusually keen interest in this place. It is puzzling that we are so badly informed about any Muslim veneration, in particular in Jobar. Did the Muslim devotion to the site evident today exist all along, was it simply unremarked by Western travellers for a long time, or did the visitors from the West simply arrive when they were not there? To answer these questions, we have to turn our attention to earlier testimonies of joint veneration in the Damascus area, in particular to the well-documented case of the monastery in Saydnaya<sup>18</sup>.

As Meri and Benjamin Kedar demonstrate, there is an abundance of medieval sources referring to interreligious encounters, with the Monastery of Our Lady in Saydnaya as the best-attested instance<sup>19</sup>. The earliest account of interreligious convergences at Saydnaya is attributed to Burchard of Strasbourg, Frederick Barbarossa's ambassador to the court of Saladin from about 1175. He recounts how on the feasts of the Assumption (15 August) and Nativity (8 September), Muslims from the region joined Christians in the celebrations, and how Christians, Saracens, and Jews (*sic*) were cured through the miraculous workings of the oil that flowed from Saydnaya's famous icon<sup>20</sup>. According to an anonymous Latin

source from the mid-thirteenth century, Saracens assembled in Saydnaya on the Feast of the Assumption and in September, to pray to the Virgin according to their religion<sup>21</sup>; more or less the same information is given in the account of the Anonymous Continuator of Guillaume de Tyr (1261)<sup>22</sup>. However, we are not dealing with a purely Western perception of matters, as is clear from the *History of the Churches and Monasteries of Egypt* (henceforth *HCME*) a multi-layered Copto-Arabic encyclopaedic treatise from the fourteenth century, based mainly on a text from about 1160 to 1187 attributed to the Coptic notable Abu al-Makarim<sup>23</sup>. The author quotes a priest who had visited the monastery and told him about the presence of approximately four or five thousand "Christians, Muslims, Nestorians, Melkites, Syrians, and others" during the feast of the Virgin, all of whom had received bottles of the miraculous oil<sup>24</sup>.

Saliently, post-medieval accounts on Saydnaya do not contain a single allusion to the participation of Muslims in the celebrations, though this, of course, does not necessarily imply that they were entirely absent. By exception, Chevalier Laurent d'Arvieux, who visited Saydnaya in 1660, stated that Turks (i.e. Muslims) visited the church with

<sup>16</sup> Immerzeel 2005; *idem* 2009a, 49-56, Pls 14-17.

<sup>17</sup> Peña 2000, 247-247.

<sup>18</sup> Stories that can at most be interpreted as the urban myths of the day are left aside here. An interpolation into the account of the pilgrim Thietmar, who visited Saydnaya in 1217, suggests that Muslims were only interested in Saydnaya because they could taste its reputed wine in secret. The same source recounts how a Muslim lady was lamented in the church because she had not received her portion of the holy oil. Yet her belief in its miraculous effects was so strong, that she received a well-filled flask filled from the Virgin herself. Another legend told in an anonymous source from the mid-thirteenth century fits into the same category of apocryphal stories: a partially blind emir from Damascus came to Saydnaya to pray and was miraculously cured. In recompense, he promised an annual 60 measures of oil for the lamps in the church (Kedar 2001, 94-95).

<sup>19</sup> Meri 1999a; Kedar 2001.

<sup>20</sup> Hamilton 2000, 207; Immerzeel 2009a, 44. See also Kedar 2001, 93-94; Pringle 1998, 219.

<sup>21</sup> Kedar 2001, 94.

<sup>22</sup> "En cele esglyse venoient tuit li Sarrazin del paiz entor la feste Nostre Dame, la mi aoust & en septembre" (Michelant/Raynaud 1882, 173); Kedar 2001, 95.

<sup>23</sup> On this text and its composition, see den Heijer/Pilette 2012.

<sup>24</sup> Immerzeel 2009a, 44, with further references; Troupeau 2005, 577.



respect, having purified themselves just as they would if they were to enter a mosque<sup>25</sup>. The Muslim devotion to Damascene Christian sites also comes to the fore in the journals of Bernard Surius and Jean de Thévenot, who stayed in the Syrian capital in 1646 and 1658, respectively. Both describe the presence of Muslims at the tomb of St George the Gatekeeper near St Paul's Gate, where the saint was stoned and buried after assisting St Paul to escape<sup>26</sup>. According to de Thévenot, they imitated the Christians in their devotion by the burning of candles. Both groups talked about miracles, and he also heard about 'Turks' being healed from an illness after spending the night at the tomb. Moreover, many Christians and Muslims joined together to celebrate the feast of the saint<sup>27</sup>.

Until the mid-nineteenth century, eyewitness reports of this kind are rare, which brings us to the matter of selective perception. Each visitor was a child of his time, and as a consequence experienced events and made observations in line with his own background. We should bear this subjectivity in mind when assessing travellers' accounts with respect to the presence of other Christian denominations in Saydnaya. What happened to the "Nestorians, Syrians and others" mentioned in the *HCME*? If we take the silence on this point in later sources to indicate absence, we must conclude that, they, too, had turned their back on Saydnaya. Again, however, isolated testimonies suggest the opposite. In 1619, the Dutch traveller Johannes van Cootwijk (Cotovicus) noticed a Maronite sanctuary in the monastic church<sup>28</sup>, and a few decades later, the afore-mentioned Surius complained about the Bishop of Saydnaya's refusal to allow him the use of any altars for a Roman Catholic celebration. He was, however, able to obtain this permission from the "Jacobites" (Syrian Orthodox), "Nestorians" (East Syrians) and others on the condition that he would read out prayers from the writings of "the heretics Nestorius and Dioscurus". Surius ultimately succeeded in obtaining permission, thanks

to the intervention of an Ottoman general<sup>29</sup>. These non-Melkite sanctuaries no longer exist anymore. According to the nineteenth-century Russian Archimandrite Porfiriy Uspensky, Patriarch Melodius (1823-1850) destroyed the Syrian Orthodox altar in the Church of the Council of Archangels, which has been identified as the present entrance room to the south of the Chapel of the Virgin<sup>30</sup>. In conclusion, one cannot escape the impression that the tradition of interreligious convergence in Saydnaya continued throughout the ages in various forms, but without drawing the attention of most Western visitors.

On the other hand, from the thirteenth century onwards traveller's accounts continued to repeat the assumption of a reluctant attitude of the Saydnayan Melkites towards Muslims. Rumours had it that Muslims risked a premature death if their stay in Saydnaya exceeded one year. As regards the source of this rumour, d'Arvieux gives the Saydnayans the benefit of the doubt, but simultaneously sympathizes with them:

*Ils [the Muslims] se sont imaginez qu'ils y mourroient au bout de l'année: soit que cette idée leur soit venue d'eux-memes, soit qu'elle soit une pieuse fraude des Chrétiens, ils sont débarrassés de ces hôtes importuns*<sup>31</sup>.

D'Arvieux also extends the suspected scaring off of Muslims to the Jewish inhabitants of Jobar: they had warned the Turks that they would die instantly if they settled in the village (Text 12). The fear of a predominant Muslim presence is also expressed in Pococke's suggestion that the perilous descent to Mar Elias was used as a pretext to prevent the Muslims from turning the sanctuary into a mosque (Text 12). This distrust was realistic; in the seventeenth century, the Church of St George near Beirut had been confiscated and transformed into a mosque dedicated to his alter ego al-Khidr, and there were many more precedents<sup>32</sup>.

In the course of the nineteenth century, the Western perception of Middle Eastern sanctuaries and traditions gradually changed. Von Kremer's remark about Muslim participation in the celebrations at Mar Elias exemplifies this alternating view. Von Kremer was also told that the traces of blood he saw in the Monastery of St Elia (Deir Mar Elia) near Qaryatain in the north-eastern Qalamun were due to sacrifices of sheep by Christians

<sup>25</sup> Labat 1735, 462.

<sup>26</sup> Surius 1789, 6.

<sup>27</sup> De Thévenot 1727, 49.

<sup>28</sup> Cotovicus 1619, 387.

<sup>29</sup> Surius 1789, 11.

<sup>30</sup> Pyatnitsky 1996, 95; Immerzeel 2009a, 48.

<sup>31</sup> Labat 1735, 462; see also Cotovicus 1619, 387; Surius 1789, 11. For thirteenth-century sources, see Bacci 2006, 4.

<sup>32</sup> Immerzeel 2009a, 122.

and Muslims<sup>33</sup>. In his *The Religions of Modern Syria and Palestine*, published in 1912, Frederick Jones Bliss remarked that the Damascene Arabic-speaking Jews called Elijah al-Khidr, and he also stated: "In monasteries where the Christians vow to Elijah or to Saint George, here the Moslems vow to the mysterious Khudr, the Ever Green or Ever Living One, whom they identify with both. At the Moslem Shrines of the Khudr Christians invoke Saint George"<sup>34</sup>. However, Bliss categorically denied the involvement of Muslims in the apparently exuberant festivities in Saydnaya:

*In many features it differs in nowise from all popular religious festivals of whatever creed in Syria and Palestine, though the total abstinence of the Moslems happily rules out at their functions the drunken brawls, sometimes ending in murder, which often disgrace the Christian feasts. In recent years the crowds at Sedenayya are said to have been better behaved than formerly*<sup>35</sup>.

In the present day, the attendance of Muslim visitors at Christian sanctuaries in the Qalamun seems to be the rule rather than the exception. Apart from Mar Elias and the Monastery of Saydnaya, this is also common practice in, for instance, Deir Mar Taqla (Monastery of St Thecla) in Ma'alula<sup>36</sup>, Deir Mar Musa near Nebk, and Deir Mar Elian near Qaryatain. In Saydnaya, the Monastery of St George also has a 'satellite' grotto refurbished as a church dedicated to St George, which attracts Christians and Muslims alike<sup>37</sup>. In addition, gatherings of this kind are also reported at St George Humeyra near Crac des Chevaliers<sup>38</sup>, and at the Monastery of St George near Beit Jala to the west of Bethlehem<sup>39</sup>.

In Sylvia Chiffolleau's recent study on the Christian feasts in Ma'alula, some 20 km to the north of Saydnaya, she furnishes some interesting indications concerning Muslim participation. The Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic processions of Ma'alula attract individual Muslims, who sometimes join the Christians in the widely performed traditional chain dance called *dabke*<sup>40</sup>. Nevertheless, their input is purely incidental:

*En contrepartie, la longue procession catholique passe devant la mosquée. L'imâm attend son passage, assis dans la cour avec quelques comparses. Le cheikh al-chabâb fait une ovation à l'imâm et "au*

*Dieu de la bible et du coran"; l'imâm fait offrir aux participants un plateau de café. Dans les deux cas, c'est la communauté chrétienne en représentation qui occupe l'espace public, tant par la présence des corps que par celle du son, voix et cloches, alors que représentants de l'ordre (politique) et de la religion musulmane se tiennent en retrait, en spectateurs, lui laissant pour une fois la primauté. Mais ces deux moments de rencontre relèvent surtout de la courtoisie et finalement, on ne repère guère de signe d'allégeance politique directe lors des fêtes de Maaloula, ce qui est une situation tout à fait exceptionnelle en Syrie*<sup>41</sup>.

However, if the involvement of Muslims in Christian ceremonies in the Qalamun were to be nothing more than an individual choice, why would they travel to holy places such as Saydnaya throughout the year? In his *From the Holy Mountain*, published in 1997, William Dalrymple furnishes an expressive observation of these visitors' rituals and motivations:

*In the same church I too witnessed a miracle, or something that today would certainly be regarded as a miracle in any other country of the Middle East. For the congregation seemed to consist not of Christians but almost entirely of heavily bearded Muslim men. As the priest circled the altar with his thurible, filling the sanctuary with great clouds of incense, the men bobbed up and down on their prayer mats as if in the middle of Friday prayer in a great mosque. Their women, sometimes dressed in full black chador, mouthed prayers from the shadows of the exo-narthex. A few, closely watching the Christian women, went up to the icons hanging from the pillars of the church, kissed them then lit*

<sup>33</sup> Von Kremer 1853, 197.

<sup>34</sup> Bliss 1912, 116.

<sup>35</sup> Bliss 1912, 116-117. For the fair-like feasts in Saydnaya, see also Goudard 1908, 466-469; Huart 1879, 9-10. Today Saydnaya's religious feasts are under strict control of the clergy to avoid excesses (Chiffolleau 2006, 186-187).

<sup>36</sup> Hérou/Slim *et al.* 2007, 91.

<sup>37</sup> The age of this tradition is obscure; the cave was discovered and refurbished in 1912 (Hérou/Slim *et al.* 2007, 108-115, esp. 111).

<sup>38</sup> Hérou/Slim *et al.* 2007, 71.

<sup>39</sup> Dalrymple 1997, 339-344.

<sup>40</sup> Chiffolleau 2006, 185, 186; see also Reich 1937, 146-156, Pls XXX-XXXI.

<sup>41</sup> Chiffolleau 2006, 188.

*candles and placed them in the candelabra in front of the images. As I watched from the rear of the church I could see the faces of the women reflected in the illuminated gilt of the icons*<sup>42</sup>.

A nun explained to Dalrymple that the Muslims came here because they wished to have children. The women spent the night in the church of the Virgin, and if their wish was fulfilled, some came back to have their newborn baptised.<sup>43</sup> Dalrymple also recounts how three Syrian cosmonauts, all Muslims, came to Saydnaya, on the eve of their stay in the Russian Mir space station in 1987. Once back from outer space, they returned to sacrifice a sheep by way of thanking the Virgin for her protection<sup>44</sup>.

The aspect of fertility also predominates in the Muslim veneration of St Thecla in Deir Mar Taqla at Ma'alula. St Thecla is also invoked in search of a cure for rheumatism and paralysis<sup>45</sup>. In the 1920s, Richard Thoumin noted the persistence of very similar practices for the same reasons in a Late Antique rock-cut sanctuary on the archaeological site significantly known as of Mar Taqla near Mnin, to the south of Saydnaya. There, too, people called upon the saint to cure them of rheumatism and paralysis; as a matter of course, this practice was much disapproved of, both by Christian clergy and imams<sup>46</sup>.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

For a better insight into the diversity in the Muslims' interest in Christian and Jewish holy sites, we turn to Kedar's attenuate classification of medieval Christian-Muslim convergences and relevant historical developments. Basing his analysis on historical sources, Kedar distinguishes three kinds of encounters<sup>47</sup>. The first one is purely spatial: both

groups join in the same sanctuary but display their own, separate celebrations and rites. The second sub-type is inegalitarian: Muslims attend Christian celebrations as observers and do not participate in any ritual activity. The third variant is where Christians and Muslims share the same ceremonies on an equal footing. Kedar puts forward the afore-mentioned testimonies on the interreligious convergences in Saydnaya as an illustrative example of the third variant, but we should bear in mind that these sources, scant though they are, relate to the situation in the late twelfth century and the first half of the thirteenth century. The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem and County of Tripoli, although geographically much reduced in size, were still extant at the time, while the adjoining territories were ruled by members of the Ayyubid dynasty. On both sides of the border, the indigenous Christian communities enjoyed a certain prosperity, which ended as the Mongol threat and the rise of Mamluk power culminated in a series of military campaigns from 1260 onwards. Suspected of making common cause with the Latins and Mongols, the oriental Christians paid a heavy price<sup>48</sup>.

From that point on, the egalitarian convergences in Saydnaya seem to disappear from sight, and when Joos van Ghistele visited the monastery in 1481, he found it impoverished and the other Saydnayan churches and monasteries in ruins<sup>49</sup>. Things had obviously changed. Nevertheless, later reports suggest that the Muslims had not forgotten about Saydnaya's miraculous icon and the other holy sites in the Qalamun. What in all likelihood remained, and can still be observed today, can loosely be classified as Kedar's first category of spatial convergence. Muslims continue to travel to Christian sanctuaries and incidentally join the festivities, but actually intend to venerate the saints in question and look for *baraka*, i.e. blessing, according to their own customs. Occasionally they adapt Christian practices, such as the touching of icons and burning of candles. At this point one wonders how reliable the medieval observations of egalitarian encounters actually are. Kedar admits that this third sub-type apparently occurred rarely. One instance he mentions concerns the convergence of Christians, Jews, and Muslims at the wells of Jerusalem in 1317, but this was an emergency situation: a period of drought had forced the city's inhabitants to jointly implore God for rain, and even then they came together in the open air, not

<sup>42</sup> Dalrymple 1997, 187.

<sup>43</sup> Dalrymple 1997, 188-189.

<sup>44</sup> Dalrymple 1997, 191.

<sup>45</sup> Thoumin 1929, 166-167.

<sup>46</sup> Thoumin 1929, 178-180. In the Cave of Elijah on Mount Carmel, Turkish women who wished for a child used to sit in a niche behind the altar in the cave. At a certain point, this aperture was closed because the custom was regarded as inappropriate (van Egmont/Heyman 1759, 7-8).

<sup>47</sup> Kedar 2001, 89-91.

<sup>48</sup> Immerzeel 2009a, 16-19, 39-40, 77-78, 141-142, with further references.

<sup>49</sup> Zeebout 2006, 301; Immerzeel 2009b, 112, 116.





Pl. 11. Synagogue of Jobar after destruction  
(Rogin 2014).

in a sanctuary<sup>50</sup>. At first sight, the convergences at Saydnaya, as attested in the writings of Burchard of Strasbourg and the *HCME*, seem to be exceptional, but credible. After all, the seventeenth-century account by de Thévenot mentioned a very similar tradition at the Tomb of St George the Gatekeeper.

With this background in mind, we conclude with a few remarks on the synagogue of Jobar and the Church of Mar Elias. However underdocumented the attendance of Muslim venerators in both cave sanctuaries may be, there are good contextual reasons to suppose that these sites, too, have been visited by Muslims throughout the ages. Yet participation in any official religious celebrations was – and is – the Muslim visitors' aim; like many Christians and Jews they sought – and seek – saintly support to face the inevitable sorrows and setbacks of daily life. From the viewpoint of human behaviour in case of specific needs and periods of personal distress, one can speak of truly interreligious encounters on sites of concentrated sanctity. The pilgrims' common interest is to be found in the call for *baraka* from Elijah / al-Khidr.

#### POST SCRIPTUM: THE BLOW OF WAR

Meant to be the output of the author's contribution to the Biblical Studies Colloquium dedicated to the tradition of the Prophet Elijah at Leiden University on 11-13 January, 2010, this article plainly neglects the sad reality of the Syrian War that broke out in 2011. After careful consideration, I decided to publish the text unrevised, even though the reported encounters between the adherents of the three monotheistic religions in Syria as a social-anthropological phenomenon seems to be further



Pl. 12. Synagogue of Jobar after destruction  
(Rogin 2014).

into the distance than ever. Until spring 2018 Jobar was the stage of heavy fights between resurgents and the Syrian army, leaving the town in ruins. De synagogue had been looted in spring 2013 and was almost entirely destroyed in May 2014, allegedly by army shelling (Pls 11-12)<sup>51</sup>. There are no reports about any war damage to the Church of Mar Elias at Ma'arrat Saydnaya.

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<sup>50</sup> Kedar 2001, 90-91.

<sup>51</sup> Rogin 2014; Jerusalem Post 2014.

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*Synagogue of Jobar*

1. Rabbi Petachia from Regensburg (1178)

At Damascus there is a synagogue which Elisha built, also one built by Rabbi Eliezer son of Asariah; it is large, and service is performed in it<sup>52</sup>.

2. Rabbi Samuel ben Samson (ca. 1210)

From Dan we travelled on to Damascus and outside the city is a synagogue which Elijah had built. It is a very fine building, and we prayed here<sup>53</sup>.

3. Rabbi Jacob (1238-1244)

In Damascus is the Synagogue of Rabbi Eleazar ben Arakh, a beautiful building in the midst of the city. In the gardens also there is a Synagogue of Elijah the prophet, a very fine building (...) <sup>54</sup>.

4. Anonymous pupil of Nahmanides (late thirteenth century)

Between the gardens is a synagogue of Elijah, may he be remembered unto good. It is awesome. There is no other like it. The Ishmaelites proclaim that this very building belongs to none other than the Messiah King<sup>55</sup>.

5. Karaite scribe to the ruler of Damascus Moses ben Samuel (fourteenth century)

On account of my this my heart was sick and sad and I made pilgrimage to the Synagogue of the Prophet Elijah fasting, wearing a sackcloth and weeping. And I made a request for Him in the hidden enclosure<sup>56</sup>.

6. Joos van Ghistele (1481)

From there [i.e. the place where St Paul was struck with blindness], when turning to the left about one mile from the town to the mountains of Salahija, one is also guided to a beautiful village which is inhabited by Jews mainly. There they have a splendid synagogue – that is, a church or oratory of their law – in which one is guided into the front side filled with hanging lamps. And in the middle of this synagogue is a tabernacle, decent enough as a pulpit, which is embellished all around with silk and precious linen, where their rabbi is used to stand when he learns and teaches the articles of the law of Moses. Also at the end of the same synagogue,

near the place where according to our customs the high altar is placed, stands a small oratory which looks very narrow and fixed, embellished at the inside with splendid silk tissues and precious rims. On this, the large shrines that contain their law written on large scrolls are put, the books of Moses, the prophets and other bible books, which they receive and keep with great dignity and reverence, stroking them with their hands and kissing if they go there. At the right side of this synagogue is a small church with a square hole in the pavement with a depth of half a man's length, in which one's feet find a passage of five steps going down. It descends to a room with a cross vault where hangs a permanently burning lamp, and where no more than about six of seven people could stand. In the past this was a cave in which Elijah took refuge to shelter from the persecution of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel as it is mentioned in the fourth Book of Kings, chapter 19. This book also mentions that God had ordered Elijah, when he was for a while on Mount Horeb and Mount Sinai, to go to Damascus to make Elijah a prophet, and to anoint Jehu king of Israel and Hazael king of Damascus and Syria. When this was done he lived in the mentioned cave and places<sup>57</sup>.

<sup>52</sup> Benisch 1856, 65; see also Benjamin II 1863, 65, n. 3; Meri 1999a, 245. For Rabbi Petachia, see Adler 1930, 64-71.

<sup>53</sup> Adler 1930, 110; Meri 1999a, 245. For Samuel ben Samson, see Adler 1930, 103-110.

<sup>54</sup> Adler 1930, 126.

<sup>55</sup> Meri 1999a, 245

<sup>56</sup> Meri 1999a, 248; *idem* 1999b, 50-51.

<sup>57</sup> Translated by the author from the original Flemish text in Zeebout 2006, 298-299: "Van daer [wo]rdtmen ooc gheleedt, omme slaende ter luchter hand omtrent een mijle vander stadt naer tgebeerchte van Salahija, teenen schoonen doorpe dat meest al bewoont es van jooden, daer hebbende eene schoone synagoghe – dat es eene keercke oft oratorie van haerlieder wet – inde welke de voorseyde gheleedt waren, die al vul lampten hijnc, ende in midden vander zelve synagoghe zo es eene tabernakele, ghenouch van fautsoene als eenen preecstoel, ronts omme verchiert met zijden ende costelicken lakene, ter welker plecken zo pleecht te stane haerlieder rabby, als hij leert ende onderwijst darticlen vander wet van Moyses. Ooc up dhende vander zelve synagoghe, omtrent der plecken daermen naer onser manieren den hooghen altaer zoude hebben, staet een cleen oratorikin zeer nauwe ende vast luuckende, binnen verchiert met schoonen zijden lakenen ende met costelicken boorden, daer up dat groote laden staen, inde welke laden bescreven ligghen in groote rollen haerlieder wet, de boucken van Moyses, der Propheten ende andere boucken der bijbelen, die zij ontfanghen ende hauden in grooter



7. Rabbi Moses Bassola d'Ancona (1522)

A mile from Damascus there is also a place called Jawbar, where there is a community of native Jews, about sixty families. There is a very handsome synagogue there, the like of which I have never seen. It is built in colonnades, with six columns on the right and seven on the left. Above the synagogue there is a beautiful cave in which, it is said, Elijah the Prophet – may his memory be blessed – hid. The synagogue is said to date from the time of Elisha. There is a stone upon which they say he anointed Hazael. At a later period, Rabbi Eliezer ben 'Arakh renovated it. It is indeed an awesome place. According to what people told me, no enemy has ever dominated it, and many miracles have been performed there. In times of distress Jews always gather in it, and nobody harms them<sup>58</sup>.

8. Rabbi Yisra'el Najjada (late sixteenth century)

In the village of Jawbar is a holy synagogue magnificently constructed (S. of S. 4:4). According to oral tradition, it was built by Elisha son of Shafat. Within there is a glorious and beautiful cave, said to be Elijah the Tishbite's. Mark how the radiance of this splendid place actually shines forth<sup>59</sup>.

9. Isaiah ben Abraham ha-Levi Horowitz of Prague (1621)

Among the aforementioned communities [i.e. Aleppo, Hama and Hims] in every synagogue there is a sanctuary of Elijah of Blessed memory. In Damascus there is a room in the cave of the synagogue where the Prophet Elijah is and where the ravens bring him bread and meat. The room is still there<sup>60</sup>.

10. Moses ben Elijah (1654-1655)

They sent us to a place which they called Jawbar. Located there is a fine and very beautiful synagogue. They say that it is the Synagogue of the Prophet Elijah of blessed memory. Inside the synagogue is a small grotto to which one descends by stairs. It is very beautiful. There they light oil lamps. We prayed with the notables and the respected elders of the Damascus community who accompanied us there<sup>61</sup>.

11. Samuel ben David (1641-1642)

We left Damascus and headed for a village nearby called Jawbar. There stands an ancient synagogue. Inside on the right hand side is the Ark of Law. Beneath the Ark is a small splendid cave. It is the cave of the Prophet Elijah. May peace be upon him whom God said unto him, "Go forth into the desert of Damascus (1 Kings 19:15)". We descended into the cave and read about his deeds and everybody made his own request<sup>62</sup>.

12. Laurent d'Arvieux (1660)

Le village appelé Jubar, est à une demie lieuë de Damas, il n'est habité que par de Juifs sans mélange d'aucune autre Nation. Ils y font voir une Grotte où ils dissent que le Prophète Elie se cacha, lorsqu'il fuyoit la persecution de Jezabel. L'entrée de cette Grotte est un trou mediocre, par lequel on descend sept marches taillées dans le roc, qui conduisent dans une Grotte d'environ quatre pas ou dix pieds en quarré. Il y a trois petits enfoncements comme des armoires ouvertes, où les Juifs entretiennent trois lampes allumées. Il y a un autre trou par où les corbeaux lui apportèrent à manger pendant quarante jours qu'il y demeura. Les Juifs ont leur Synagogue auprès de cette grotte. Ils ont eu assez d'esprit pour persuader aux Turcs superstitieux qu'ils mourroient s'ils entreprenoient de s'établir dans ce Village, & par ce mendonge ils ont privé leur grotte de l'honneur qu'ils n'auroient pas manqué de lui rendre<sup>63</sup>.

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weerdicheden ende reverencien, haerlieder handen daer an strijkende ende die cussende als zij daer toe gaen. Inde zelve synagoge ter rechter hand es een cleen cappellekin int welke staet een viercant gat int pavement, recht neder dalende wel eens halfs mans lingde diepe, daermen in vindt metten voeten een steegherkin van vijf trappen neder gaende, door dwelke men daelt in een voutkin, oversteken met eenen cruce booghwij, daer altijts eene berrende lampte in hanct, niet meerdere dan datter omtrent zes oft zeven lieden zouden moghen in staen, dwelke heeft in voorleden tijden eene speluncke gheweest daer Helias in ghedoken ende ghevloten was voor de persecutien des conincx Ahab ende vander coninghinne Yesabel, ghelijc daer af ghenouch gheroert staet ten vierden boucke vanden Coninghen int xix<sup>e</sup> capitele. In welken bouc ooc staet dat Helyas was gheboden van Godsweghe, doen hij gheweest hadde een lettelt tijts ten beerghe van Oreb ende ten berghe van Synay, dat hij gaen zoude naer Damasco omme onderweghen Eliseum prophete te makene, ende Jehieu te salvene coninc van Ysrael, ende Azahel te makene ende salvene coninc van Damasco ende van Syrien, dwelke ghedaen zijnde, woonde ter voorseyder speluncken ende plecken".

<sup>58</sup> Lewis 1939, 183; Meri 1999a, 252.

<sup>59</sup> Meri 1999a, 246.

<sup>60</sup> Meri 1999a, 246.

<sup>61</sup> Meri 1999a, 250.

<sup>62</sup> Meri 1999a, 250.

<sup>63</sup> Labat 1735, 461-462.

13. Vincent Stochove (1662)

A une lieüe de la ville on remarque encore le lieu où le Prophete Helye alla trouver Elysée, pour le faire son disciple, au mesme endroit les Chretiens avoient baste une Eglise, sur le ruines, les juifs qui reverent grandement ceste mémoire en ont maintenant basty une Sinagogue<sup>64</sup>.

14. Jean de Thévenot (1658)

Il faut encor aller & un village appelé Iobar, distant de la ville de demy lieuë & qui n'est habité que de Iuifs, il-y-a une Synagogue, au bout de laquelle se voit une grotte a costé droit de quatre pas en quarré, pour y entrer il faut descendre par un trou sept degrez taillez sur le roc, on dit que c'est le lieu où se cacha le Prophète Helie, fuyant le poursuite de la Reyne Iesabel, on y voit encor le trou par où les corbeaux luy porterent des vivres durant quarante jours. Il y a dans cette grotte trois petites armoires servans à mettre trois lampes entretenues<sup>65</sup>.

15. Johannes Aegidius van Egmond, Johannes Heyman (first quarter of the eighteenth century)

The next day we hired asses to visit Heva Jubbar, a place about two hours from *Damascus*. Among the inhabitants of this town are several Jews, who, according to their commendable custom, have erected a synagogue. This is said to be the place where Elijah anointed Hazael king over Syria. Here we were shown a small cave, wholly incrusted with marble, and on the top of it a small aperture to evaporate the smoak of a lamp perpetually burning in it: this being the place, according to the tradition of the Jews, where the prophet Elijah was fed by ravens<sup>66</sup>.

16. John Green (1736)

In the village Yawbar, half a league from Barsa, the Jews have a Synagogue, built, as they say, by their Fore-fathers in the Place where they had formed the Grot of the Prophet Elijah, in order to secure the sacred books, which they had saved out of the Temple of Solomon, when Titus and Vespasian sack'd Jerusalem. In the middlemost of three little Churchs that stand on the East side of it, they have deposited the Pentateuch in a Coffe of precious Wood, covered with a rich Stuff; together with some other Hebrew Manuscripts, each is written on several Skins of Parchment, joined together by the Ends, and rolled up, making a great round Volume. Elijah's grot is in the Church on the right Hand; it lies on the South Side of it, and is enlightened by several lamps,

burning in honour of the Prophet. The Descent to it is by two Steps. The Jews call it, The Grot of Elijah, because in that Place, they say, the Prophet consecrated Hazael to succeed Benhadad King of Syria; and that the new King was obliged to hide himself in it, to avoid the Fury of the reigning Monarch<sup>67</sup>.

17. Richard Pococke (1737)

I made an excursion to the north west of Damascus to see some remarkable places that way. About two miles north of the city is a village called Jobar, where there is a synagogue like an old Greek church, as they relate it formerly was. On the spot, which is now the middle of the synagogue, they say, Elijah anointed Hazael king over Syria, as he was commanded by God. In three apartments of the synagogue there are thirty six copies of the law, excellently well written on parchment rolls, each of them having a round wooden case to put them in; and tho' they seem to make little account of them, yet is has been mentioned that the law was preserved here when Titus destroyed the temple. From one of these rooms there is a descent to a small grot, in which there is a hole like a window, where, they say, Elijah was fed by the raven; but that miracle was wrought near the river Jordan<sup>68</sup>.

18. Ulrich Jasper Seetzen (1806)

In dem eine halbe Stunde von hier entfernten Dorfe Dschobar (in Büsching Jobar) waren vormals lauter Juden allein sie sind in der Folge Mohammedaner geworden. Es ist dort eine Grotte, wo der Prophet Elias sich verborgen gehalten haben soll, und welche bey den Juden in hoher Achtung steht. Es ist dort eine Synagoge, welche ausserordentlich häufig von hiesigen Juden besucht wird, um dort ihren Gottesdienst zu halten. Auch halten sie sich oft einige Tage dort auf; aber wohnhaft ist dort kein anderer Jude, als ein kleiner Rabbin. Dschobar gehört bey de Juden zu einem der vorzüglichsten Wallfahrtsörter. In der Nähe davon giebt es noch ein Dorf, dessen Jüdische Einwohner Mohammedaner wurden, und noch ein drittes, dessen christliche Einwohner ebenfalls Mohammedaner geworden sind<sup>69</sup>.

<sup>64</sup> Stochove 1662, 314.

<sup>65</sup> De Thévenot 1665, 437; quoted in Lewis 1939, 183 n. 6.

<sup>66</sup> Van Egmont/Heyman 1759, 260.

<sup>67</sup> Green 1736, 53-54.

<sup>68</sup> Pococke 1745, 130.

<sup>69</sup> Seetzen 1854, 314.

19. Benjamin II (1848)

Half a mile to the east of this town, on leaving by the Gate Bab Duma, lies the little village of Djubar or Djubaris in which reside several Jews, and where there is a very ancient Synagogue. Tradition says that it was built by the Prophet Elisha and destroyed by Titus, but restored again by the Rabbi Eleazar, the son of Arack. In the Talmud there is also mention made of a Synagogue in Djubar, which was ruined in the 16th century by the apostasy of a Jew.

The structure of this ancient building reminds one of the Mosque Moawiah, the interior was supported by 13 marble pillars; 6 on the right and 7 on the left side, and is everywhere inlaid with marble. There is only one portal by which to enter. Under the holy shrine, where the Pentateuch was preserved, was a grotto, wherein several persons could stand upright; the descent to which was by a flight of about 20 Steps. According to the Jews, the Prophet Elisha is said to have found in this grotto a place of refuge from the persecutions of King Ahab. Except the grotto, in which there is nothing uncommon, there is nothing more of the above mentioned to be seen. — At the entrance of the Synagogue, towards the middle of the wall to the right, is an irregularly formed stone, on which can be observed the traces of several steps. Tradition asserts that upon this stone sat King Hazael, when the Prophet Elisha anointed him King. The Jews relate wonderful things of this Synagogue. It was respected by every conqueror; and, even the Arabs, who otherwise laid waste the whole country, have not touched this building, which is of an extraordinary solidity; and the Jews, who sought refuge there, were never exposed to attacks<sup>70</sup>.

20. Isabel Burton (1875)

Jobar is a Moslem village, with a synagogue, which is a pilgrimage for Damascene Jews; it is dedicated to Elijah, and built over a cave, where they believe the prophet used to hide in time of persecution. A railed off space shows where he anointed Hazael. When the Prophet was at Horeb, 'the Lord said unto him, return on thy way to the wilderness of

Damascus; and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria" (1 Kings xix.15)<sup>71</sup>.

21. Karl Baedeker (1882)

Djôbar est un gros village habité par des musulmans et par quelques familles juives seulement. Ces dernières y ont leur vieille synagogue (kénîsé), située au S.E. et fréquentée aux jours de fête par beaucoup de juifs de Damas. Près de l'entrée de l'édifice se trouve un espace fermé par une balustrade où, selon la tradition, Élie aurait fait le sacre d'Élisée comme prophète et celui d'Hazaël, comme roi de Syrie. A dr., par derrière, se trouve une porte qui conduit dans une petite sale, d'où on entre avec peine en rampant dans une espèce de chambre où, dit-on, le prophète Élie vécut quelque temps et fut nourri pas des corbeaux (III Rois XVII, 6). Outre que le ruisseau Kerith ne peut être cherché ici, le rabbin Toudela, qui a recueilli toute sorte de traditions de ce genre, ne fait pas encore mention de celle-ci au XIIIe s. Une armoire à cet endroit renferme quelques rouleaux assez anciens de la Thôra<sup>72</sup>.

22. Mrs MacIntosh (1883)

The synagogue they consider specially sacred and favoured, for they believe that a little paved cell below is sometimes visited by the spirit of Elisha, and sick people are often taken to this cell and left there alone all night in the hope that Elisha's spirit will exercise a healing influence over them. No doubt the change of air from their damp rooms in Damascus to the more open and free air of the country does exercise a good effect on many<sup>73</sup>.

23. Frederick Jones Bliss (1912)

In monasteries where the Christians vow to Elijah or to Saint George, here the Moslems vow to the mysterious Khudr, the Ever Green or Ever Living One, whom they identify with both. At the Moslem Shrines of the Khudr Christians invoke Saint George. At Jobar, near Damascus, the Arabic-speaking Jews pay vows at the Shrine of Elijah, whom they too call Khudr, and take part in a nature dance, the men separately from the women<sup>74</sup>.

*Mar Elias, Ma'arrat Saydnaya*

24. Richard Pococke (1737)

About four leagues from that convent [i.e. the Monastery of Saydnaya], we arrived at a village called Marah, where there is a Greek parochial

<sup>70</sup> Benjamin 1859, 41-42.

<sup>71</sup> Burton 1875, 140.

<sup>72</sup> Baedeker 1882, 511.

<sup>73</sup> MacIntosh 1883, 98-99.

<sup>74</sup> Bliss 1912, 4; Meri 1999a, 251.



church of the Roman communion, and a Greek convent, which had in it only one lay brother, who lives there to entertain those who come to see the church, which is about two miles to the east, near the top of the mountain; it is built, as they say, at the grot of Elisha, where Elijah came to anoint him to be his successor, as he was commanded by God, when he ordered him to go towards the wilderness of Damascus; and on the outside of it there was a passage, which is now stopped up, that led to some other grot, the entrance to which was also shewn. The Greek pretend, that it is the place where the prophet was anointed, and that it is dangerous to go in it; which seems to be a piece of policy to hinder the Mehometans from taking possession of the place, and turning it into a mosque; it commands a fine view of the whole plain of Damascus, and of the city itself, and in that respect it is a delightful retirement<sup>75</sup>.

25. Alfred von Kremer (1850)

Das Fest des heiligen Elias ist es, das alle Jahre eine grosse Anzahl von Christen hierherbringt: die einen kommen aus Andacht und kehren, nachdem sie die Frühmesse gehört haben, nach Damascus zurück. Die Andern kommen, um ihren Keif zu halten, bleiben zwei bis drei Tage daselbst und besuchen das Kloster in Seidnâjâ. Das Fest des heiligen Elias war im Jahre 1850 am 1. August. Die Reliquien des Heiligen werden in Maa'rra aufbewahrt, und das Fest des heiligen Elias ist ein wahres Volksfest der Damascener. Es ist an demselben Tage auch das Fest, welches Marbânîjet-es'-S'eif heisst, an welchem die ersten vierzig Tage des Sommers enden. Dieses Volksfest, dem ich beiwohnte, sprach sehr den rohen Charakter des syrischen Christen aus. Nachmittags am letzten Juli ritten alle diejenigen hinaus, welche am Feste des heiligen Elias Theil nehmen wollten, der ganze Weg von Damascus bis nach Maa'rra war mit Reitern und Frauen, die auf Eseln sassen bedeckt; viele von den Reitern waren betrunken oder wenigstens von starken Branntweinlibationen so aufgeregt, dass sie, da die Meisten überdiess noch auf Miethpferden ritten, der grössten Ausgelassenheit sich hingaben; sie sprengten felsige Wege, wo die Steine in schiefen Platten lagen, auf denen die Pferde ausgleiten mussten, unter Anrufen des Mâr Elias hinan und trieben anderen Unfug. In Maa'rra selbst herrschte die grösste Regsamkeit an der Quelle, die vor dem Dorfe fliesst, und an der stets grosse Mengen mit

Abtränken der Pferde beschäftigt waren; im dem Dorfe selbst waren in jedem Hause fünf bis zehn Personen für das Nachtlager einquartirt, diese sassen in Gruppen beisammen um Feuer, und vertrieben sich die Zeit mit Singen. In der Nacht kamen die Männer aus Seidnâjâ herüber, das bloss eine halbe Stunde von hier entfernt ist, und kündeten ihre Ankunft mit Flintenschüssen an, dann ward unter dem Klopfen einer kleinen Trommel und Singen Umzug durch das Dorf gehalten; so verging die Nacht, und Morgens eine Stunde nach Sonnenaufgang fand die Messe in der Kirche statt, die etwas ausserhalb des Dorfes liegt. Die ganze Menschenmasse von mehreren Hunderten strömte hin, hörte die Messe, welche nach gewöhnlichem syrischem Ritual abgehalten wurde, zündete dem heiligen Elias die mitgebrachten Wachskerzen an, und kehrte dann ins Dorf zurück, wo von frisch geschlachteten Lämmern geschmaust wurde. (...184) Selbst Mohammedaner kommen an dem oben beschriebenen Festtage nach Maa'rra mit Gelübden, weil sie ihren Profeten Chid'r für eine und dieselbe Person mit dem Mâr Eliâs halten<sup>76</sup>.

26. Clément Huart (1879)

A une demi-heure de Ma'arra se trouve une chapelle de Mar-Élias (Saint-Élie), creusée dans les flancs d'un immense mur de quelque mètres de haut, qui sépare brusquement la chaîne des collines qui s'élèvent au-dessus de Berzé et de Khân-Qosséir, du massif principal de l'Anti-Liban. Ce n'est qu'une simple petite salle carrée, dont le plafond est taillé en forme de voûte; au milieu s'élève un autel où l'on vient quelquefois dire la messe; devant la porte, on trouve un puits creusé dans le roc. Pour y arriver, il faut se laisser glisser, en se retenant des pieds et des mains, sur un affreux sentier, véritable casse-cou; des marches sont taillées des distance en distance dans le rocher. On remonte par le même chemin. De la petite plate-forme qui précède la chapelle, on a une vue des plus grands étendues sur toute la contrée (...)<sup>77</sup>.

<sup>75</sup> Pococke 1745, 133.

<sup>76</sup> Von Kremer 1853, 182-184.

<sup>77</sup> Huart 1879, 13-14.

## *Crosses on Stone Pillars: Echoes of Georgian Memories of Jerusalem\**

Erga SHNEURSON

### INTRODUCTION

A multitude of cross ornaments in various forms and compositions adorning church façades, icons, stelae, stone pillars and more, can be found in Georgia, in particular on mountains in the Kart'li province (Central-Eastern Georgia; Fig. 1). One type of this vast repertoire of ornamented objects are embellished stone pillars, which became widespread serving as objects of veneration in the open air from around the fifth to the eighth century. Such pillars are adorned with reliefs on all four sides and display crosses and biblical subjects such as Daniel in the Lion's Den, the Sacrifice of Isaac, the Annunciation, Nativity, Baptism, and Crucifixion. The Cross symbol appears either as an individual emblem or incorporated into one of the biblical scenes. Such stone pillars reflect an extensive use of the Cross in religious art and form a significant contribution to the Christian iconography idiosyncratic to Georgian sacred topography and cult<sup>1</sup>. Both Kitty Machabeli and Nina Iamanidze labelled the pillars as stone crosses, claiming that the stones supported a cross in the open air. Material evidence and written sources related to the fourth to the sixth centuries indicate that the veneration of the Cross became widespread in Georgia during that period, and continued ever since.

According to the legend, the first cross was erected on a mountain overlooking the city of M'tskheta – the then capital of the Georgian Kingdom of Iberia and situated to the north of Tbilisi – by the female saint Nino, who is believed to have converted Kart'li to Christianity<sup>2</sup>. The chronicle of the *Conversion of Kartli* also incorporates other legends concerning Nino's activities, such as of the 'life-giving pillar', 'Christ's Holy Garment', and the 'Fiery Cross'<sup>3</sup>. The legend of the Conversion was spread in the Caucasus as an oral and written tradition. From the fifth century on, there is evidence alluding to the circulation of Nino's legend,

in different sources<sup>4</sup>. The cross she erected heightens the long and progressing process of cross veneration, which, moreover, was entwined with the historical events in Jerusalem during the fourth century (discussed below). Nino's legend and life story became a formative event, not to say a foundation myth of Georgian Christianity. The written tradition presents her as a mediator on behalf of the Georgian people. Her legend is deeply rooted in the Georgian belief from the early stage after Christianisation, not as an act of commemoration, but rather as an expression of faith, confidence and conviction. The abundant use of the Cross emblem in Georgian art stemmed from, and echoed Nino's legend and activities.

In her study "Remarques sur l'iconographie de la crucifixion sur les stèles géorgiennes du haut Moyen-Âge", Machabeli argues that "The appearance of the crosses and stone pillars was determined by historical conditions, events, and daily life, and

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<sup>1</sup> In Armenia the material evidence also shows use of the cross in art, though artistically differing from the Georgian crosses, and not within the scope of this study. Cf Machabeli 2008b, 27.

<sup>2</sup> For the Christianization of Kart'li, see: Salia 1983; Silogave *et al.* 2007; Thomson 1996, 255-309; Toumanoff 1949; *idem* 1963, 407-415.

<sup>3</sup> On the Nino legend and the chronicle: Horn 1998, 242-264; Lang 1956; *idem* 1976, 19-37; Philip 1997, 10.9-10; Rapp 2003, 111-112, 165-166, 246-247; Thomson 1996, 84-184.

<sup>4</sup> For written sources on the legend of St Nino and her conversion, see Toumanoff 1949, 16-29. The earliest sources are adapted Armenian and Greek translations.



Fig. 1. Map of Georgia (after [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khashuri\\_Municipality](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khashuri_Municipality)).

they have been integrated into the universal art of the Paleo-Christian period transmitted through the prism of popular traditions”<sup>5</sup>. She thereby emphasizes the importance of studying the stone pillar phenomenon as a unique model in medieval Georgian art, its contribution to our knowledge of the period, and no less so also from a broader perspective beyond that of Georgia alone. Machabeli’s seminal book and articles provide some of the few studies dedicated to the stone pillars to date. In her book, she presents a catalog of the extant objects including their original provenance, dates, and description, wherever available. Machabeli focuses mainly on analyzing the stylistic aspects of the reliefs and the meaning of the scenes, with photographs of each pillar<sup>6</sup>. In her article “Early Medieval Stelae in Georgia in the Context of East Christian Art”, she outlines the framework of the subject concerning the status of Georgian art within a study of medieval art in general. Early stone pillars

provide an important chapter in our understanding of early Christian Art. Machabeli connects the stone pillars depicting the cross emblem and other biblical scenes to Christ’s earthly activities such as his Baptism in the River Jordan and the large cross erected on the spot where the event was believed to have occurred. At the same time, she posits the possibility that the Georgian stone pillars with cross ornaments imitated the large “votive cross that stood in Jerusalem between the Basilica of Constantine and the Holy Sepulchre”<sup>7</sup>.

In “Toward a Detailed Typology: Four-Sided Stelae in Early Christian South Caucasus”, Sipana Tchakerian addresses the stone pillars from a different perspective, however<sup>8</sup>. She relates to Georgia and neighbouring Armenia as one unit, thus, presenting a strongly constructed typology of the structure and ornamentation of stelae from both countries, scrutinizing the surviving examples by their visuality, demonstrating the commonalities and differences in the development of the four-sided stelae, but ignoring geographical borders and historical, religious and other differences<sup>9</sup>.

This study aims to analyze the ‘four-sided sculptured stelae,’ i.e., the stone pillars, from a different approach which comprises both local and

<sup>5</sup> Machabeli 2000, 92.

<sup>6</sup> Machabeli 1998a.

<sup>7</sup> Machabeli 1998a, 86.

<sup>8</sup> Tchakerian 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Tchakerian 2016, 126.



wide-ranging perspectives. The cross is the most ubiquitous emblem on stone pillars, church façades, icons, etc. Such an individual Christological symbol, which over the course of many centuries continued to absorb and reflect various and flexible meanings, reflects the particular religious situation of the sixth to the ninth centuries, and the human social desires of the society in which it functioned<sup>10</sup>. Furthermore, this study elaborates on the historical events of the fourth century in Jerusalem and the way they are echoed and reflected in local art, combining local perceptions and universal Christian theological thoughts. I contend that these events engendered a transformation in the cross veneration and subsequent appearance in art.

The focus of this study is the so-called Usanet'i stone pillar and its decoration. In the first part, I will analyze the pillar and its reliefs as a case study connected to the shift in the status of the cross on the one hand, and local perceptions on the other hand. The following part provides a brief glance into the fourth-century events in the Holy Land that led to the shift in the status and symbolism of the cross, and focuses on later events that occurred in Georgia and led to perceiving its old capital, M'tskheta, as the New Jerusalem. This perception has become anchored in Georgian thought ever since. The last part of the study is dedicated to the performative aspects derived from the possible function of the pillars in the relationship between the beholders and the sculpted stone pillars.

#### THE USANET'I STONE PILLAR

The Usanet'i stone pillar, dated to the eighth or ninth century and now in the National Museum in Tbilisi (Pls 1-12), was found in Khashuri municipality in Shida Kart'li province, a mountainous area to the east of the Svanet'i district, on top of a mountain in the open air near a church (Usanet'i Church)<sup>11</sup>. According to Nino Iamanidzé, the pillar was raised as a symbol of devotion of a donor, a feudal lord<sup>12</sup>. Its height is 1 m, the base measures 26 × 26 cm, and the upper part is 23.5 × 25.5 cm<sup>13</sup>. The pillar bears no visible traces of a cross that would have been placed on it. The most important investigation to date on the stone pillars and the subjects depicted on them was carried out by Machabeli (see above). Iamanidzé studied some of the scenes on the pillars and other objects in a liturgical context. She follows Machabeli's viewpoints

and analyses the Usanet'i pillar as an eighth-century example of local Georgian style combined with Byzantine influences, which reflects the period of departing from the antique sculptural forms toward a dematerialized, abstract style<sup>14</sup>. Nodar Shoshiashvili provided translations of the Georgian inscriptions on it<sup>15</sup>. The pillar is decorated on all four sides with Christian scenes (directions are according to Shoshiashvili; Pl. 1a-d):

Side 1 (Pl. 1a). The upper register displays Daniel in the Lion's Den (Pl. 2). The register below includes Sts Peter, Paul and Andrew with accompanying inscriptions (Pl. 3). The third register features three figures the left one of whom is St Cosmas, whose name is given in a vertical inscription on the border (Pl. 4). The other two figures are unidentified, but the middle one should be St Damian, the usual companion on St Cosmas. The bottom part of the pillar may have originally featured reliefs, but these can no longer be distinguished. All the figures are rendered in frontal position and of similar appearance. The three apostles are dressed in belted robes, schematically depicted by vertical lines. Their hands hold a book with a cross ornament in front of the upper part of their body. The figures in the second register are also portrayed frontally; two of them hold a scroll-like object in the left hand while the other hand is raised. The third figure seems to be a female saint with long hair and a beltless robe<sup>16</sup>.

Side 2 (Pl. 1b). The upper and middle registers feature the Archangels Michael (Pl. 5) and Gabriel (Pl. 6), respectively, and the third register represents a scene with inscriptions (Pl. 7). The scene consists of an angel holding a martyr's crown over a saint identified as St Kvirike, who is depicted standing frontally stretching out his hands towards a slightly larger kneeling figure to the left. The latter raises his hands toward the saint in a gesture of

<sup>10</sup> On the symbolism of the cross, its development and meanings in Christian art, see Klein (2004a), who discusses the True Cross, providing a comprehensive history and valuable sources.

<sup>11</sup> Iamanidze 2008, 229, *eadem* 2010, 33.

<sup>12</sup> Iamanidze 2008, 230.

<sup>13</sup> Machabeli 1998a, 126.

<sup>14</sup> Iamanidze 2008, 239-240.

<sup>15</sup> Shoshiashvili 1980, 123-130.

<sup>16</sup> Machabeli considers them to be Cosmas and Damian, but she is silent regarding the third figure (Machabeli 2008a, 36); Iamanidze (2008) also doesn't discuss the female figure.



*Pl. 1a-d. Usanet'i stone pillar, s-1-4: National Museum, Tbilisi  
(all photographs of the pillar National Museum).*





*Pl. 2. Detail of Pl. 1a: Daniel in the Lion's Den.*



*Pl. 3. Detail of Pl. 1a: Sts Peter, Paul and Andrew.*



*Pl. 4. Detail of Pl. 1a: Sts Cosmas and Damian;  
female saint.*



*Pl. 5. Detail of Pl. 1b: Archangel Michael.*

supplication. The inscription reads “St Kvirike, St Kvirike! Have mercy on Katsolie”<sup>17</sup>. Below the angel, one distinguishes a second, weathered small figure in proskynesis. An inscription to the right reads “St Kvirike have mercy upon me”.

Side 3 (Pl. 1c). Two large crosses one atop the other, each on a small pedestal (Pl. 8). The lower register depicts an enigmatic scene consisting of two frontally posed figures to the left and a third

one to the right (Pl. 9). Only the upper part of their bodies can be seen today, apparently attired in the same fashion as the figures on Sides 1 and 2. The left persons' hands hold an unidentified object

<sup>17</sup> The name is according to Nodar Shoshiashvili, though Machabeli provides, differently, only “k...e” (Machabeli 2008b, 128; Shoshiashvili 1980, 123-130). Iamanidze (2008, 230) states that the inscription next to Abraham could not be deciphered, and for the other inscriptions, only the name of Kvirike is given.





*Pl. 6. Detail of Pl. 1b: Archangel Gabriel.*



*Pl. 7. Detail of Pl. 1b: unidentified scene.*



*Pl. 8. Detail of Pl. 1c: two crosses.*



*Pl. 9. Detail of Pl. 1c: unidentified scene.*

in front of their body. The third figure has one hand raised and holds a long object, in all likelihood a sword. An accompanying votive inscription reads: "And bless the soul of his uncle"<sup>18</sup>. To the left of this figure one distinguishes a worn-off shape

that might represent another figure in proskynesis, or animal.

<sup>18</sup> Machabeli says on this inscription "The scene is supplied with fragmented inscription" (Machabeli 1998b, 213). The inscription trans. by Lado Mirianashvili.

Side 4 (Pl. 1d). On the upper part of the pillar the Entry into Jerusalem is depicted (Pl. 10). Two angels hover over Christ, who is seated side-saddle on a donkey. He is surrounded with figures holding palm branches and one climbed in a palm tree. On the sculpted line below are five figures holding palm branches following Christ's entry or welcoming him.





Pl. 10. Detail of Pl. 1d: Entry into Jerusalem.



Pl. 11. Detail of Pl. 1d: Baptism of Christ.

The second register depicts the Baptism of Christ (Pl. 11)<sup>19</sup>. The latter is portrayed as a youth with a cross halo, in a baptismal font adorned with a cross. The dove descends toward Christ. St John the Baptist is represented in a frontal position with one hand pointing to Christ; a standing angel is on the other side. Between the angel and the dove is a star. Next to the Baptist is an inscription identifying Christ. Beneath this scene is a large cross (Pl. 12).

While several saints and scenes are easily identified, either by an inscription or by employing a conventional iconographical formula, others such as the scene with St Kvirike, remain unclear. Hence, we now turn to study this saint and his *Vita* and



Pl. 12. Detail of Pl. 1d: cross.

explore how it developed through the centuries, which may shed light on the enigmatic scenes.

#### SAINT KVIRIKE/CYRIACUS

St Kvirike is a warrior martyr whose cult was prominent in the region of Svanet'i (Western Georgia; Fig. 1). In the lowlands of Georgia, the cult of St Kvirike also flourished<sup>20</sup>, although not as intensely as in the mountains. In Georgia, he is called St Kvirike, while outside the country he is referred to as Cyriacus (Oriental Churches) or Quiricus/Cyr (Latin Church)<sup>21</sup>. According to Brigitta Schrade, many churches were dedicated to him until the eleventh century; his name was popular with monks as well as high clergy and worldly rulers<sup>22</sup>. St Kvirike's popularity in Svanet'i serves here as a comparative model for the earlier religious situation in the Kart'li region. The common religious ground between the

<sup>19</sup> Iamanidzé 2004, 31.

<sup>20</sup> Marr 1911, 112; Schrade 2001, 180, and n. 76.

<sup>21</sup> Schrade 2002, n. 59, with reference to Cañellas *et al.* 1999, 491.

<sup>22</sup> Schrade 2002, 180. The first bishop of Bana was named Kvirike (Thomson 1996, 372). Thomson (1996, 266-271, 278, 299) mentions several political authorities bearing the name Kvirike, as they appear in the chronicle of the *Book of Kartli*.



Pl. 13. Old boiling pot of animal during rituals  
(photograph Erga Shneurson).

highlands and lowlands is the orientation to the Jerusalem liturgy until the tenth century (see below). The feast day of the saint is the 28<sup>th</sup> of July and is considered the main feast day in Svanet'i<sup>23</sup>. The Church of St Kvirike (Lagurka) in Kala (1111) was a focal point attracting many pilgrims from all

over Georgia already in the eleventh century<sup>24</sup>. On the saint's feast day in medieval times, the liturgical rites of the church were combined with the sacrifice of animals in a nearby building<sup>25</sup>. Michele Bacci assumes that this rite was a practice based on pre-Christian customs<sup>26</sup>. Interestingly, the Mestia Museum preserves a huge old pot (cauldron) for boiling the animal, used by the villagers during the rite (Pl. 13).

Regarding this practice, Schrade states: "In excavations of the area, original pagan worship was found there, a church was built close to in the tenth century, which was enlarged in the twelfth century, into a monastery, due to its strategically important location. The church and monastery function until the nineteenth century as a religious center of the Svan. Half pagan – half Christian feasts are typical for all Svanet'i (much as it happened elsewhere)"<sup>27</sup>. In her opinion, the pagan practice was certainly part of the worship for a long time and because of the centrality of Lagurka Church, typical to all Svanet'i.

St Kvirike's *vita* describes him in two ways: as a child and as an adult<sup>28</sup>. Schrade explains the difference between the two versions from the old cult of

<sup>23</sup> 28<sup>th</sup> July corresponds to 15<sup>th</sup> July according to the old Julian calendar (Schrade 2002, 178 n. 61). 28<sup>th</sup> July appears in *Le Synaxaire Éthiopien* as the feast day of Cyriacus and Julitta; Cyriacus is presented as her three years old son. At the same time, the Synaxaire presents St Kvirike as having the force and power to protect the people and household stating: "Il ne craignit pas le crépitement de la flamme, qui retentit comme le bruit du tonnerre; grâce à cela, il obtint un pacte de miséricorde du Fils, à savoir que la mort n'arriverait pas aux troupeaux, ni la peste aux hommes, là où un temple (une église) serait bâti sous son vocable" (Guidi 1911, 372). A lectionary from Latali mentions 15<sup>th</sup> July as St Kvirike feast day furnishing the readings of the day referring to the heavenly warrior (Schrade 2002, 180 n. 82).

<sup>24</sup> Mepisashvili/Tsintsadze 2000, 101.

<sup>25</sup> Bacci 2016, 210.

<sup>26</sup> Bacci 2016, 210.

<sup>27</sup> Schrade, in her article and in private discussion.

<sup>28</sup> On the various appearance of the figure of Kvirik: In the Golden Legend he was described as a child. Hamer 2006, 370. Kvirike as an adult appears in Svanetian churches. His *Vita* as an adult is found in a version of Symeon Metaphrastes' collection of saints' lives – *menologion*. Schrade 2001, 180;



the saint and the shift from the liturgy of Jerusalem to that of Constantinople during the tenth-eleventh century. This change would have resulted in a new cult appropriate to the new liturgical service<sup>29</sup>. A second historical change that occurred during this period was the unification of the East and West Georgian churches under the Patriarchate of M'tskheta, the old capital of Kart'li. Returning to St Kvirike, his early *vita* presents him as a hero who fought for his faith and thus was martyred. This version survived in the Eastern Churches. In art he appears together with St George, as a soldier or combat hero, connected ideologically with his martyrdom. In the lowlands of Georgia, the cult of St Kvirike also flourished as attested to by various sources, although not in the same way as in the mountains<sup>30</sup>. During the earliest phase of development of Kvirike's *vita*, the saint appears as an unbeatable warrior who amazes the infidels with his physical strength and rhetorical abilities. It is stated that he encouraged his mother Julitta to admit and declare that he was the leading power between the two<sup>31</sup>. At a certain stage, around the tenth to the eleventh century, the *vita* reduced him to the status of being a child of the Martyr Julitta. It is possible that the increasing popularity of female saints in Georgia played a role in this matter.

The cult of St Kvirike in Svanet'i survived over a long period, and various inscriptions and representations have been found, dating up to the fourteenth century<sup>32</sup>. Two churches in Upper Svanet'i are dedicated to the saint: the earlier mentioned Lagurka Church<sup>33</sup>, and the church belonging to the village of Ushguli. In both churches he is depicted as a martyr with the martyr's cross, though dressed differently. The Lagurka Church preserves the richest treasury of icons and wall paintings depicting St Kvirike both as a martyr and Julitta's son<sup>34</sup>. A metalwork icon from Ushguli, now in the Church of the Saviour in Chazhashi, shows St Kvirike as a youth martyr in courtly military dress (Pl. 14)<sup>35</sup>. A similar approach as a youth or adult martyr can be seen in Ipari Church of St George (1096) on a chancel barrier, painted by T'evdore. The artist may have done so because of his respect for old texts, or due to Svanet'i society being traditionally conservative and following the old traditions. St Kvirike, as represented in T'evdore's paintings in Svanetian churches (eleventh-twelfth century), is considered a patron of a highly venerated church, a helper of the valley of Kala, and one of the celestial

protectors of the Svans, in accordance with the early version of his *vita*<sup>36</sup>. This perception seems to corroborate how the Usanet'i pillar depicts St Kvirike, that is, as a young warrior martyr protecting the congregation that venerated him.

#### THE SCENES: ARCHANGELS AND SAINTS IN THE LOCAL CONTEXT

Archangels functioned as protectors, and in Svanet'i, their veneration contributed to the structure of the society<sup>37</sup>. Their feast days were still being celebrated in the twentieth century. In medieval ceremonies, the verbal formula of their blessing placed them as in the second hierarchy after God, following the formula established by Pseudo-Dionysus the Areopagite (hereafter PDA) in his treatise *Celestial Hierarchy*<sup>38</sup>. In PDA's exploration, archangels appear to have an inherent capacity to mediate between the celestial and the ecclesiastical hierarchies<sup>39</sup>. The task

Hogel 2002, esp. appendix 174-202; Efthymiadis 2014, 182-192; Ehrhard 1887, 531-553; Peterson-Ševčenko 1990. According to Peterson-Ševčenko, St Quiricus is depicted in the *menologion* as an elderly bearded monk in his cell.

<sup>29</sup> The shift to the Constantinopolitan liturgical tradition influenced different aspects, such as the rite and the script during this period of transition (Baldovin 1987; Van Esbroeck 1975; Froyshov 2007, 139; Tarchnishvili 2012, 206; Magaloblishvili 2013, 33; Martin-Hisard 2009, 671; Metreveli 1978, 43-48; Mgaloblishvili 2001, 230 n. 10).

<sup>30</sup> Marr 1911, 112; Schrade 2001, 180, n. 76.

<sup>31</sup> Basset 1923; Guidi 1911; Schrade 2001, 179-180, n. 76.

<sup>32</sup> Schrade 2001, 181.

<sup>33</sup> The Lagurka church in Kala was built in the tenth century, while the monastery and the paintings are dated to the twelfth century, with the change reflecting an early version of the Passion (Schrade 2001, 178).

<sup>34</sup> In a private discussion, Schrade stated that there are eight representations of the saint in Lagurka and one in Ushguli. For example, in a wall painting he is depicted as a young martyr with the martyr's cross. He is shown there, following his execution, as his mother laments her son's death. Another fresco depicts Julitta's execution. On the masonry iconostasis, below the Deesis image, Sts Kvirike and Julitta depicted flanking by Stephen Protomartyr and Christina. In an icon from Lagurka church, he is shown as an imperial official or patrikios, though once again with the martyr's cross.

<sup>35</sup> Qenia 1986, Pl. 16.

<sup>36</sup> Schrade 2001, 181.

<sup>37</sup> Schrade 2001, 185.

<sup>38</sup> Rorem 1987.

<sup>39</sup> This treatise and its methodological commentary helped to shape medieval Western and Byzantine theories about symbols in general, both biblical and liturgical (Rorem 1993, 49).



*Pl. 14. Metalwork icon: St Kvirike. Church of the Saviour, Chazhashi  
(photograph Rolf Schade).*



of the angelical hierarchy is to move between the hierarchies, delivering the divine spirit to earth. The understanding was that the angelic hierarchy, possessing both sublime divinity and earthly corporeality, was destined to transmit the divine light to the lowest earthly level<sup>40</sup>. Accordingly, the archangels on the pillar embodied this capability to mediate between the hierarchies delivering the divine spirit to the local community.

The cult of the archangels was established in the early stage of Christianity in Georgia<sup>41</sup>, and the Usanet'i pillar is only one example testifying to this trend in sculpture. In the Svanet'i area, archangels often appear together in art, and so they do on the Usanet'i pillar. In this context, they are the protectors of a valley, village, or church, and are addressed as the heavenly supports of the community. As such, their prominent appearance on the pillar is almost self-explanatory. The meaning of such a composition, beyond its apotropaic expression, lies in the approach of the work's commissioner(s) toward local trends, beliefs, and expectations, no less than to any biblical messages.

Thus, the reliefs on the pillar raise questions of identification and possible interpretation of the iconographic program. The upper and middle registers of the Usanet'i pillar are relatively well preserved, and the scenes can be interpreted. However, the third register of Side 1, as far as it is readable, poses a problem as to who the three depicted figures are (Pl. 4). On the left margin, a vertical inscription identifies Cosmas, and the next figure is probably St Damian because the two physician saints are usually depicted together<sup>42</sup>. The third figure stands out from the long hair and absence of a belt, and no inscription is discernible today. Although no satisfactory identification can be given, the figure seems to be a female.

Georgia has a long tradition of venerating female saints, starting with St Nino. Rich hagiographic literature on the subject exists, presenting stories about local and universal female martyrs and saints<sup>43</sup>. In Svanet'i, female saints are often represented in groups together with warrior saints, as can be seen in other areas such as Tao-Klarjeti in Georgia and Cappadocia<sup>44</sup>. The prominent female saints in Svanet'i are Barbara, Catherine, Julitta, Marina, Christine, Irene, and Thecla<sup>45</sup>. Schrade convincingly demonstrates that female saints enjoyed great popularity in Svanet'i, because they were the counterpart of the much venerated military saints. This leads to the assumption that

the female figure depicted on the pillar is Julitta, the mother of St Kvirike, who according to the presence of inscriptions invoking his name was the central figure on the stone pillar on which he appears as a military saint. Nonetheless, it is also possible that some other of the popular female saints is represented here.

Next, to the female figure, Cosmas and Damian are portrayed<sup>46</sup>. They are known for their miraculous cure of people asking for remedies, though their acts were very often conditioned: the saints asked their patients to convert to Christianity as a prerequisite for a cure. Their activities were also anti-heretic, and their *vitae* includes stories recounting their fight for the right faith, i.e., Orthodoxy<sup>47</sup>. The subsequent conversion was followed by baptizing of the healed client, thus generating particular ties between former pagans, the medical field, and baptism. Physical maladies were considered spiritual ones that moved within the realm of illness and religious conviction, between bodily malady and

<sup>40</sup> Rorem 1984, 68.

<sup>41</sup> Schrade 2001, 186.

<sup>42</sup> More about Sts Cosmas and Damian: Klaniczay 2010.

<sup>43</sup> Schrade 2001, 182; Tarchnishvili 1955, 392-394.

<sup>44</sup> In the Svan the role of female saints as mediators, are linked to the female role in earthly affairs. Women had an equal position in Svanet'i, where the duties of daily life were divided between men and women, as were the cults. This stimulated the existence of female cults. In Oshki Church and Ishani Cathedral, Tao province, the following female martyrs are mentioned in inscriptions: Sts Marina, Irene, Catherine, Barbara, Thecla, Helena and Nino. St Nino is sculpted on the column in Oshki church, identified by style. In Ishani cathedral, Sts Barabara and Marina are depicted. According to Schrade's study, it is possible that the Svanet'i tradition was derived from the Tao-Klarjeti region (Schrade 2001, 182-184, n. 90; see also Eastmond 1998, 84; Velmans 1979).

<sup>45</sup> St Nino was probably not highly venerated in Svanet'i, because St Andrew is considered the converter of Western Georgia; there are no traces of a cult of Nino here, and she is also absent from the old Svan lectionaries (Schrade 2001, 183, n. 97).

Nino was highly venerated in other parts of Georgia and the most important female saint in the overall history of Georgia. Schrade's opinion is that the female figure on the pillar represents Saint Barbara, who is the most venerable female saint in Svaneti. St Julitta is the second in popularity (Schrade 2001, 183-184). In my opinion, the female figure can be Julitta, otherwise there is no connection to the supplication scene, and because of the location of Usanet'i pillar in Shida Kart'li and not in Svanet'i.

<sup>46</sup> In 1907 an unknown version of Cosmas and Damian miracles was found in Egypt. The manuscript provides more data on their miracles and activities (Rustafjaell 1909; Van Esbroeck 1985, 61-77).

<sup>47</sup> Csepregi 2011, 17, 22-24.



spiritual beliefs. At the beginning of the seventh century, Georgia accepted the Chalcedonian Creed and turned to Orthodoxy ever since. On the other hand, Bacci connects the ritual of the Church of Kvirike/Lagurka to old pagan rituals<sup>48</sup>. Thus, a connection was created between baptism, physician saints, and Orthodoxy, negating heretics and monophysitism<sup>49</sup>. The anxiety of a conservative society in a time of great changes would have been encapsulated in the ritual enacted in Kvirike's church and consequently reflected on the pillar.

The third register of Side 3 features another enigmatic scene, which Machabeli has interpreted as the Sacrifice of Isaac (Pl. 9). However, this interpretation is debatable because of the absence of elements characteristic of this scene, at least none that can be detected today<sup>50</sup>. For example, and importantly, one wonders why Abraham would have been depicted as a warrior instead of a bearded old man, as the OT presented him<sup>51</sup>. The interpretation is even less probable when taking into consideration that the votive inscription above this scene states "And blesses the soul of his uncle". What, if any, could be the connection between such an inscription and the scene the Sacrifice of Isaac? I argue that the scene depicts St Kvirike as a young warrior martyr as he appears in the metalwork icon from Ushguli (Pl. 14). He likely protects his congregation in the Shida Kart'li province in accordance to his role in the beliefs of Georgian society, and the rites celebrated on his feast day in Svanet'i in the church of Lagurka. The depicted animal (as

Machabeli and Iamanidze consider it) between the saint and figures might refer to the old pagan ritual of sacrifice as Bacci argued<sup>52</sup>. Such interpretation would also corroborate Schrade's investigation on and statement about the possible synthesis of Christian and non-Christian society.

How might the interpretation of the enigmatic scenes influence the general message of the iconographic program of the pillar? Machabeli has asserted that the number of biblical themes and symbolic images is strictly balanced. In her view, there are two scenes from the Old Testament and two from the New Testament; two three-figure friezes; two angels; two monumental crosses of the same shape; and a donor image. Machabeli has further asserted that "The master of Usanet'i has accomplished a highly expressive artistic unity through the creative distribution of scenes of various shape and size"<sup>53</sup>. She sees in this stone pillar an example of the sophistication of the sculptor on the one hand, and from the message of the scenes, i.e., the Triumph of Christianity, on the other hand.

Based on local practices and perceptions, the novel interpretation of the scenes illustrates St Kvirike as a mature saint according to the old version of his *vita*. From his appearance as a warrior and invocative inscriptions, he seems to function here as an intercessor for the persons mentioned in the inscriptions, who must have been members of the Shida Kart'li community. Assuming that the female figure on Side 1 is his mother Julitta, who is one of the female martyr saints popular in Svanet'i and the Georgian lowlands, the scenes thus mirrors local customs of veneration<sup>54</sup>.

Other scenes in the pillar represent the connection to Jerusalem, the *loca sancta*, and the shift in the Cross' perception occurred during the fourth century in Jerusalem. Regarding the stone stelae in Georgia, Bacci stated that they are manifestations of piety and apotropaic tools<sup>55</sup>. More than that, in broader perceptions, the cross depicted on the pillar, as a self-contained object of worship, erected in the open air, echoes ancient memories of Jerusalem's *loca sancta* in Georgia and the True Cross. Since the Usanet'i pillar bears no evidence of supporting a cross or other object, it may have functioned as a self-contained object of veneration. The three depicted crosses, and the iconographic program as a whole, function as a symbolical essence of the cross.

<sup>48</sup> Bacci 2016, 210.

<sup>49</sup> In 609 Georgia accepted Chalcedonian faith and refuted Monophysitism. More on this subject: Toumanoff 1954; Mgaloblishvili *et al.* 2009, 22; Rapp *et al.* 2012.

<sup>50</sup> Elements of the scene of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac are: Isaac kneeling on the ground beside the altar, sometimes Abraham grasps Isaac hair, occasionally the ram is depicted in the bushes nearby. The hand of God emerges from above, and sometimes Sara stands on Abraham's side. More reading on the subject: Moore Smith 1922.

<sup>51</sup> During centuries of artistic development, Abraham is always depicted as an old man, obeying God's demand to sacrifice his beloved son, which reflects a sad moment in his life, not a victorious one.

<sup>52</sup> Bacci 2016, 210.

<sup>53</sup> Machabeli 2008a, 36.

<sup>54</sup> The supposed balance between the scenes as presented by Machabeli, though it seems generally acceptable, is obsolete. As a consequence, new viewpoints are needed.

<sup>55</sup> Bacci 2016, 211; Machabeli 1998a; *idem* 2008; Tchakerian 2016.

There was perhaps nothing more fundamental to medieval man than the cross on which Christ had died. As an image and a self-contained object of worship, it possessed an all-embracing symbolic significance. For a long period, until the mid-fourth century, the cross had been considered as an instrument of torment, mostly due to its use by the Roman rulers as punishment and, thus as bearing negative connotations<sup>56</sup>. The notion of the cross as an instrument of torture became less of a central issue in the following centuries, evolving instead to symbolize something else<sup>57</sup>. It became Christ's symbol and a crucial instrument of God's plan of salvation<sup>58</sup>.

Three gospels speak about the cross as an instrument of torment and recount of Christ's agony (Mat. 28:5-6; Mar. 16:6; Luk. 24:3-6)<sup>59</sup>. John adds that Christ was lifted up on the cross, and also that the cross was linked to his glorification (John 3:14; 12:32, 34; 8:28). John perceives the cross, like Paul, as a symbol of redemption in Christ, partaking in God's salvation plan<sup>60</sup>. The first step in initiating a shift in the perception of the cross was that of the vision by Constantine the Great (ca. 285-337) in 312. Next was Helena's journey to the Holy Land and the finding of the True Cross<sup>61</sup>. The third step was the legal abolition of crucifixion as a method of execution, and the fourth step was Cyril of Jerusalem's vision of the cross over Jerusalem in 351<sup>62</sup>. These events were crucial to the change in perception and status of the cross, transforming it from a symbol of torture into a symbol of victory over death. With Helena's discovery, the Christian world allegedly held a piece of the True Cross, pieces of which were distributed to various Christian centers<sup>63</sup>. These changes in the understanding of the cross and the shift it underwent go beyond the scope of the symbol in Georgia, but encompass its general history, symbolism, and status in the Eastern and Western Christian worlds. From the early fifth century, the complex layers of perception of the cross manifested it as an eschatological symbol of God; an instrument of evangelization; a *vexillum* (military standard) as a token of God's reign; an apotropaic emblem; and a fragment of wood<sup>64</sup>.

The Georgian perspective on that period and events appears in the Chronicle of *The Conversion of Kartli by Nino*, which describes certain events and

miracles such as the rediscovery of the relic of Christ's tunic in Svetic'xoveli Cathedral (1010-1029)<sup>65</sup>, and the arrival of St Nino in Kart'li. According to the *Georgian Chronicles*, a Georgian Jew from M'tskheta named Elias, was in Jerusalem when Jesus was crucified. Accordingly, Elias purchased Jesus' tunic from a Roman soldier at Golgotha, and brought it to Georgia. In the fourth century, Nino arrived at Kart'li after being educated in Jerusalem, and her activities resulted in the conversion of the Iberian King Mirian and ultimately Kart'li to Christianity. Many elements in the Chronicle are evidently directed at making M'tskheta the New Jerusalem, such as the rediscovery of Jesus' tunic in M'tskheta, the apparition of the Cross in the sky, and the erecting of Nino's cross on the mountain facing M'tskheta<sup>66</sup>. As Rapp and Crego argue, the legend of the raising of crosses was incorporated into the Georgian tradition, following the transformation Jerusalem underwent during the fourth century<sup>67</sup>. The *Georgian Chronicles* have come down to modern times in several versions<sup>68</sup>.

<sup>56</sup> Tzapherēs 1971, 27.

<sup>57</sup> The wood of the cross was already physically present and venerated in both Jerusalem and elsewhere by at least 351, as we know from the Catechetical Lectures of Cyril. Egeria wrote about the veneration of the True Cross around 385. Accordingly, the legend seems to have developed and spread in the third quarter of the fourth century (Drijvers 2011, 125-174, esp. 148-149; Drake 1985).

<sup>58</sup> Baert stated on the subject "A complete fusion of fact and symbolism could only take place when the use of the cross as an instrument of torture was finally discontinued, under Theodosius I (379-395) (...). Once removed from the penal statute book and stripped of its negative connotations, the Cross (...) would become a crucial instrument of God's plan" (Baert 2004, 22; see also Klein 2004b).

<sup>59</sup> The three Gospels speak of Christ's Ascension to heaven, but do not mention how. John adds that he was "lifted up" (Morris 1999, 92-93; van Tongeren 2000, 1).

<sup>60</sup> 1 Cor. 1:17-18, 23-24; Gal. 3:1, 13.

<sup>61</sup> On Helena, additional reading and sources for the legend of the True Cross: Drijvers 2011; Baert 2004; Klein 2004b.

<sup>62</sup> Irshai 1996.

<sup>63</sup> Van Tongeren 2000, 1-3.

<sup>64</sup> Baert 2004, 2; van Tongeren 2000, 17-18 n. 8.

<sup>65</sup> Svetic'xoveli Cathedral was built upon the ruins of the fourth-century wooden crypt and the fifth-century basilica built by Gorgasali (Mepisashvili/Tsintsadze 1979, 115-116, 150-157).

<sup>66</sup> On the central status of Jerusalem in the chronicle, see Rapp/Crego 2012.

<sup>67</sup> Rapp/Crego 2012, 176.

<sup>68</sup> Thomson 1996, 384.

From the seventh century, the legend of the finding of the True Cross by Helena was enhanced by another legend, which mostly spread throughout the Eastern part of the Christian world: the Exaltation of the Cross by the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius 610-641, connected to Heraclius's capturing the Cross from the Persians<sup>69</sup>. The connection between the Finding and Exaltation of the Cross developed liturgically, intrinsically, and theologically. The veneration of the cross and the act of raising or displaying it was part of the liturgy of Jerusalem, as can be learned from early sources<sup>70</sup>. The Georgian written evidence, such as the chronicles of the ninth-to-tenth century historian Juanšer, and Sambat Davitdze who recorded the history of Kart'li, contributes to clarifying the shift in veneration of the cross in Georgia

from the early stages following Christianization. The chronicles describe the completion of the construction of the Jvari Church ("Church of the Holy Cross"), near M'tskheta (597-607), on the hilltop where St Nino was believed to have erected her cross, and include Heraclius and his fight against the Persians<sup>71</sup>. Furthermore, they depict a gathering on Fridays and Thursdays, in M'tskheta, Jvari Church, and in other churches:

*"[...] decreed a gathering every Friday. All bishops and priests of that place and region gather with the Catholicos in front of the Venerable Cross; they celebrate Friday like Good Friday. There are gathering in the (church of the) Catholicosate every Thursday, and they celebrate (at) the Holy Sion as on Holy Thursday with the mystery of the body and blood of Christ. At Mc'xet'a there is a gathering every Tuesday at the Episcopal (Church)"*<sup>72</sup>.

In Bacci's opinion, the high prestige that St Kvirike was awarded in Svanet'i and the cultic success of Lagurka Church can be explained by the association of this site with Christological worship. This is due to a second important pilgrimage that once took place on Easter Saturday, and the high location of the church which corroborates that of Jvari Church, thus Nino's cross and legend<sup>73</sup>. Consequently, a long thread of continuous worship and rites connect the recorded legends, churches, and other objects of open-air veneration to the development of the cross cult. No less, this tradition probably contributed to the wide dispersion of open-air stone pillars, stelae, and other objects on which the cross was depicted throughout Georgia. The records indicate that the celebration of the cross in Georgian churches resembled the Jerusalem liturgy during Holy Week, including the Exaltation of the Cross and liturgical processions. Moreover, until the tenth century, the Georgian liturgy followed the Jerusalem liturgy, which is characterized as a stational liturgy<sup>74</sup>. The Usanet'i pillar, possibly reflects the stational liturgy developed in Jerusalem and used in Georgia.

The earliest indications of the stational liturgy derive from Egeria's diary, dated to about 385. She described Holy Week in Jerusalem and wrote that the Friday liturgy included the veneration of the "Wood of the Cross" and other relics, and that the congregation then moved on to other services and processions<sup>75</sup>. The most important source for the stational liturgy relevant to this study besides Egeria's

<sup>69</sup> On the historical events of capturing and recapturing the cross: van Tongeren 2000, 3-4; Baert 2000, 133-139.

<sup>70</sup> For the veneration of the cross and displaying it on Christ tomb and on the altar's church during the Easter week, Egeria's diary is the first existing written evidence to mention the cross as a cultic object and object of veneration. C.C.S.L. 1965, *Itinerarium Egeriae*, 36,5-37,3; Wilkinson 1981, esp. 75-80, 85,87, 136-137; van Tongeren 2000, 18-19. In the *Chronicon Paschale*, PG 92, 713 (30) appears the Greek word 'Σταυροφάνεια' which means manifestation or display of the Cross to the people and is a synonym of the word 'ὑψώσεις' which means elevation, display, *exaltation* (van Tongeren 2000, 28 n. 51; Whitby 1989). Theodosius, Bishop of Alexandria reported in 530 on his pilgrimage to Jerusalem and said that the Cross was displayed on Christ's tomb (C.C.S.L., 1965, Theodosii. *De Situ Terrae Sanctae*, 31; Wilkinson 1977, 71). Alexander of Cyprus (527-565), PG 87/3, reported the celebration of the dedication of the Martyrium on Golgotha and the Anastasis rotunda, on the same day, mentioning the Exaltation of the Cross on this day. The Armenian Lectionary provides the oldest liturgical evidence of the later-developed feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (Baldovin 1997, 71).

<sup>71</sup> The chronicle tells about the struggle to capture and retake the 'Wood of Life'. On his way to Persia, Heraclius arrived in Kart'li, lay siege to the city of Tbilisi, and finally killed King Stepanoz. Later Heraclius marched on to Persia, captured Baghdad and took the Wood of Life. Returning from the war, according to the chronicle, he stopped again in Kart'li (in Manglisi and Erusheti) to take the "foot-rest and the nails of our Lord Jesus Christ, which had been given by Constantine to Mirian" (Thomson 1996, 124, 233, 236; Toumanoff 1963, 390).

<sup>72</sup> Thomson 1996, 236.

<sup>73</sup> Bacci 2016, 210.

<sup>74</sup> A stational liturgy is a service of worship at a designated church, shrine, or public place in or near a city or town, on a designated feast, fast, or commemoration, which is presided over by the bishop or his representative and intended as the local church's main liturgical celebration of the day (Baldovin 1997, 37).

<sup>75</sup> Baldovin 1997, 61; Wilkinson 1971.



diary is the Georgian Lectionary (GL), for which it is reasonable to date its major sources, as witnessing the Jerusalem liturgy, to between the late fifth and eighth century<sup>76</sup>. The GL reports and reflects on the development of the stationary Jerusalem liturgy, conducted during Holy Week and all year round<sup>77</sup>. The sources of the AL (Armenian Lectionary) confirm the origins of the Georgian version of the hagiopolite stationary system before the eighth century (hagiopolite: “of the Holy City”)<sup>78</sup>. Baldovin claims that the origin of the stationary system in Jerusalem is connected to ecclesiastical requirements, as well as to a process of historicizing the liturgy<sup>79</sup>.

It is interesting to note the following changes that the GL introduced regarding Holy Week, and to compare them to Egeria and the AL: the three-fold procession around the Anastasis was expanded to include the entire Golgotha complex, that is, the Chapel in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre; the lighting of one candle, which contradicts Egeria and the AL; and on Friday afternoons the Adoration of the Cross was incorporated into the reading synaxis<sup>80</sup>. These changes in the liturgy, as reflected in the GL, are probably responsible for the citations in the Georgian chronicle regarding the processions and the gathering, on Thursdays and Fridays, around the cross displayed on the façade of the Church of Jvari and that of other churches. In the context of the veneration of the cross, this matter draws attention to the increasing importance of Golgotha and of the cross atop it, and to the centrality of the Jerusalemite *loca sancta* to the Georgians during that period, as it was to the whole Christian world<sup>81</sup>. It points to the Jvari Church and its cross as a focal point reflecting the shift in perception that occurred during the fourth century, giving rise to the worship of the cross and empowering the cult of the cross throughout Georgia<sup>82</sup>. This process correlated with the spread of the stone pillars across the country as a focal point of veneration in the open air from the sixth century onward.

The Usanet’i stone pillar was designed, like many other stone pillars, as a self-contained object of worship in the open air, detached from a church. The setting on a mountain peak, with a possible background scenery of the sublime environment of the Caucasus, offered a unique sacred place enabling the beholders to experience an intimate interaction with the divine, and thus attracting the pilgrims who came to venerate it, resonating Jvari and Nino’s cross, Jordan River, the Entry to Jerusalem,

Golgotha Cross, and procession in the Golgotha complex (mentioned above). In each of these places, exaltation-adoration of the cross was a central component in the rite. The pillar features biblical and historical scenes, universal and local saints, and archangels. The three large crosses represented on it not only are the focus of the cult of the cross, but also suggest the landscape of Jerusalem of the fourth to sixth centuries, following the stationary liturgy of Jerusalem, the exaltation of the cross in the open air, the cross erected in the Jordan River to mark the location of Christ’s baptism<sup>83</sup>, and the Golgotha cross. Moreover, the three crosses on the pillar are reminiscent of Nino’s vision of the cross. Following the conversion of Kart’li which according to tradition occurred around May 1<sup>st</sup>, 337<sup>84</sup>, three crosses were created from a special tree that had sprung up by “the virtue of God” at the baptismal site<sup>85</sup>. That tree miraculously developed into a forest and the three crosses were placed inside the church of M’tskheta that was later erected at the site<sup>86</sup>. Every night a cross of fire descended from

<sup>76</sup> Baldovin 1997, 73.

<sup>77</sup> The Georgia Lectionary is actually a *typikon* that was collected from a series of manuscripts from different periods by M. Tarchinshvili. In 1912 C.S. Kekelidze first edited some of the pieced-together series. The GL is a much more extensive calendar than the Armenian Lectionary (Baldovin 1997, 72-79).

<sup>78</sup> Baldovin 1997, 73.

<sup>79</sup> Baldovin 1997, 73.

<sup>80</sup> Baldovin 1997, 98-99.

<sup>81</sup> Rapp/Crego 2012, 175-192. Bacci contends that pre-altar crosses in Georgia echo Golgotha (Bacci 2016, 207-225).

<sup>82</sup> The importance of cross veneration in Kart’li and the Caucasus is well known. It first mentioned by Armenian Historian named Movsēs in the fifth century (Thomson 1978, 238-240; Bacci 2016, 211 n. 8). More on Movsēs is given by Thomson (1976, xxix-xxxiv).

<sup>83</sup> Iamanidze 2004, 43.

<sup>84</sup> The chronological events of Kart’li’s Christianization vary according to the version of the legend. Most historians accept dating the event to ca. 337 (Rapp 2003, 11; Lerner 2003, 36).

<sup>85</sup> Nina Chichinadze claims that Mirian activities were in order to establish the cult of the true cross (Chichinadze 1999, 27-49, esp. 28).

<sup>86</sup> This church is Sveti’-c’xoveli which according to the legend was first erected by Mirian, was probably a crypt encapsulating the wooden column and called “The Holy of Holies”. Symbols of salvation from the O.T. like the column of light converge with the Cross of Constantine, with the tree, which provided the Cross, and with the Temple of Jerusalem and the Holy of Holies (Rapp/Crego 2012, 188). See also n. 63.

heaven and hovered above the church until dawn<sup>87</sup>. All the signs in the legend and the Georgian chronicles echo the finding of the True Cross, the *loca sancta* of Jerusalem, the Golgotha Cross, and the footsteps of Christ.

In the early stage of the consolidation of Christianity, the Usanet'i pillar combines the most important Christian symbol, the Cross, with historical and biblical events and with patron's saints and local beliefs. It is a multi-sided monument presenting within its original spatial context reflections of multivalent values. The stone pillar phenomenon reflects the impulse of a conservative society to present their supplications to their patron's saintly intercessors, in a manner resonating spiritual, theological thoughts. Alongside the depictions of Theophany, the Triumph of Christianity, evangelists, archangels and crosses, this society, at that certain moment in their history, chose to address St Kvirike as a powerful young warrior saint. A saint familiar with the area, favoring its inhabitants, and best and most strongly able to represent them before the Lord.

The Usanet'i stone pillar is only one example of such stone pillars widely spread in Georgia, many of which are sculpted and feature symbols that resonate memories of the Jerusalem *loca sancta*. One other artistically unique example, besides the Usanet'i pillar, is the relief on St Demetre Church in Tskala-Edezani, dated to the sixth-seventh century (Pl. 15)<sup>88</sup>. The Edzani stone pillar depicts an architectural structure of columns based on a pedestal and culminating in a capital engraved with arches resembling the Holy Sepulchre imagery mounted with a large cross<sup>89</sup>. A cross is also engraved on the pedestal. The pillar's engraving importance lies in the iconographic connection it establishes between itself and the Golgotha Cross, during the early stages of Christian art<sup>90</sup>. The emblem of the cross is embedded with Christological connotations of the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and the Ascension. The cross, however, juxtaposed with the Holy Sepulchre depicted at the top of the pillar, typically symbolizes Christ's victory over death<sup>91</sup>. It exemplifies



Pl. 15. Stone relief: cross. St Demetre Church, Tskala-Edezani (photograph Lado Mirianashvili).

the composition's versatility, destined to evoke religious feelings in those approaching the church.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the Usanet'i pillar, along with the Edzani and many other stone pillars, strongly reflects the seminal events experienced by the Christian world in Jerusalem. The stone pillars and their iconography emerge as offering support to our knowledge on the development of the status of the symbol of the cross and the cult of its veneration in a remote area unacquainted with Western culture. This phenomenon constitutes of a variety of segments expressing local tendencies of veneration and rituals, but not less, it serves as a tool to study a lesser-known chapter in the art history of the period under discussion.

In this paper, I explored the novel ways in which sculptures and unique objects, were used to

<sup>87</sup> Thomson 1996, 199.

<sup>88</sup> Machabeli 2008b, 121-128, esp. 123.

<sup>89</sup> Machabeli 2008b, 121, Pl. 1.

<sup>90</sup> Another example that draws a connection to the Golgotha Cross can be seen on a stone cross pillar from Khandisi, bearing the same composition on the top (Machabeli 2008a, 123, Figs 4-6).

<sup>91</sup> Machabeli 2008b, 123.

incorporate local beliefs and traditions with universal theology. The Usanet'i stone pillar, simultaneously stands as a unique object of veneration and widespread representation of the cult of the cross in Georgia. In a sophisticated way the Usanet'i pillar reveals local rural life through art, offering access to significant but little-studied parts of the Georgian and Byzantine cultures.

The stone pillars phenomenon in Georgia reflected the event occurred in the Holy Land, relatively, at an early stage after Christianization. The Georgian artisans found the path on how to express local beliefs, traditions, and rites, combined them with universal events of the Eastern Christian world. Georgian art is not only inseparable from the rest of the Christian world, but in many cases of surviving examples, should be considered, as an expression of artistic and religious origin<sup>92</sup>. Focusing on a solitary rural mountain society which is usually far from big centres and hard to be reached opens in front of the reader significant artistic chapter, that though remote, shed light on the early development of cross adoration and exaltation, echoing *loca sancta* and stational liturgy of fourth-century Jerusalem.

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<sup>92</sup> In a way, Machabeli indicated this viewpoint, though from a more general Georgian perspective. Her research is a pioneering path, which serves as a foundation for further researches. For more on the cross in Georgian art and its connection to the Holy Land, Shneurson, forthcoming.



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# *Heiliges Öl und Inkarnation: Kult und Wundertätigkeit der Chaghoura bei Burchard von Straßburg und Abū l-Makārim*

Christiane M. THOMSEN

In der ersten Hälfte des 13. Jahrhunderts wurde das griechisch-orthodoxe Marienkloster Saidnaya<sup>1</sup> zu einem der bekanntesten Wallfahrtsorte lateineuropäischer Pilger außerhalb des Heiligen Landes (Fig. 1; Pl. 1)<sup>2</sup>. Hauptattraktion war die Chaghoura, eine vermutlich mit dem Motiv der *Maria lactans* bemalte Ikone<sup>3</sup>, welche der Überlieferung zufolge eine heilbringende Flüssigkeit absonderte und zu Fleisch geworden war: "(...) aus ihren Brüsten entströmte eine ölähnliche Flüssigkeit, welche anschließend ihrerseits zu Fleisch wurde" berichtet Guy Chat<sup>4</sup>, der 1186 im Auftrag von Aimery le Brun als erster eine Phiole des heiligen Öls nach Europa in das Kloster Altavaux brachte<sup>5</sup>.

Obgleich die Überreste der ursprünglich fünfschiffigen Basilika auf die außerordentliche Bedeutung Saidnayas als Kultort schon in frühbyzantinischer Zeit hindeuten, setzen die Nachrichten über das Kloster erst 1176 mit dem Bericht Burchards von Straßburg ein und stammen meist von auswärtigen, lateineuropäischen Besuchern des Ortes<sup>6</sup>.



Fig. 1. Karte der Region um Damaskus  
(Zeichnung Mat Immerzeel).

<sup>1</sup> Der Name bedeutet Stätte unserer Herrin, wird aber nicht unbedingt auf das Kloster zurückgeführt. In der ältesten Tradition lautet der Name Sad Manaia und bezeichnet ein Jagdgebiet – vielleicht dort, wo sich der Legende nach eine Gazelle aufhielt, die Justinian den Ort für den Kirchenbau anzeigte. Der ursprünglich fünfschiffige Kirchenbau des Klosters legt die Klostergründung in der Zeit Justinians nahe, wofür aber keine archäologischen oder historischen Belege vorliegen. Hamilton 2000, 207; Immerzeel 2007; *idem* 2009; *idem* 2010; *idem* 2017, 235, 238; Pringle 1998, 219-221. Vermutlich bestand an diesem Ort schon ein vorchristliches Heiligtum; Immerzeel 2017, 242; Immerzeel/Kleiterp 2011, 96; Castellana 2007, 33f. In der Umgebung Saidnayas befindet sich gemäß der Tradition das Grab Abels, in der Nähe wurde auch der Geburtsort Abrahams vermutet; nicht weit entfernt liegt der Ort, an dem Elias in den Himmel aufgefahren sein soll; Immerzeel 2017. Früh wurde Saidnaya ein religiöses Zentrum mit mehreren Kirchen und Klöstern, darunter das Ephraimkloster und das Cherubimkloster, welche beide aus byzantinischer Zeit stammen. Zum Ort und Kloster siehe Burns 1998, 229-229; Keriaky 1936; Pitard 1987, 150; Porter 1855, 340-348.

<sup>2</sup> Neben Jerusalem und dem Katharinenkloster auf dem Sinai wurde Saidnaya oftmals als dritter Pilgerort genannt, auch nach 1291 blieb es beliebtes Pilgerziel europäischer Reisender; Bacci 2006, 1-2; Hamilton 2000, 212; Immerzeel 2007, 13; *idem* 2017, 227; Peña 2000, 110. Für die Annahme, das Kloster sei schon Ende des 12. Jahrhunderts "an important goal for Western pilgrims travelling from Acre" gewesen, gibt es hingegen keine Quellenbelege; vgl. Pringle 1998, 219.

<sup>3</sup> Bacci 2006, 8; Hunt 1991, 119-121; Immerzeel 2007, 16; *idem* 2009, 45; *idem* 2017, 228-233. Zum Motiv der stillenden Maria siehe auch Bonani 1995; Cruikshank Dodd 2003; Cutler 1987; Schreiner 1994, 178-201; *idem* 2011. Die Verehrung einer als 'Maria von Damaskus' (Our Lady of Damascus) bezeichneten Ikone in der Kirche von Valetta, welche 1530 von Rhodos nach Malta gebracht worden war und als Kopie der Chaghoura angesehen wird, zeigt hingegen den Typus der Eleousa, eine Variante der älteren Hodegetria; Hamilton 2000, 213-214.

<sup>4</sup> ... ex uberibus eius liquor quidam emanat, in similitudinem olei, qui postmodum in carnem vertitur, Devos 1947, 273 (E cod. Brux. II 1064 f. 158v).

<sup>5</sup> Aimery (Aimeric) le Brun (Graf von Montbrun) hatte 1178/1179 das Kloster Altavaux (Haute-Vienne) gegründet, 1186 ließ er ein neues Gebäude und auch die Kirche errichten; Hamilton 2000, 211; Leroux *et al.* 1883, 81.

<sup>6</sup> Zur Überlieferung siehe Baraz 1995; Garosi 2015; Thomsen 2018, 247-250.



*Pl. 1. Marienkloster Saidnaya (Bild Mat Immerzeel).*

Besonders die Templer propagierten den Kult der bis dahin im Westen unbekannten Chaghoura. Auch Guy Chat hatte das Kloster wohl nicht selbst besucht, sondern das Öl von einem Templer, Walter de Marangiers, erhalten<sup>7</sup>. Seine Beschreibung der Ikone mit dem expliziten Bezug zu den Brüsten Marias beruht daher höchstwahrscheinlich nicht auf Autopsie, zumal das auf der Chaghoura abgebildete Marienbildnis zum Zeitpunkt der einsetzenden Berichterstattung kaum mehr zu erkennen war.

Für die Besucher des Klosters war weniger die Darstellung Marias selbst von Bedeutung als das aus der Ikone ausströmende Öl mit seiner heilbringenden Funktion und ihre dadurch wie auch in

der Inkarnation sinnlich erfassbare bzw. spürbare Gegenwärtigkeit. Ob ihrer Wundertätigkeit verehrten gleichermaßen Christen der Ostkirchen, Muslime und möglicherweise auch Juden die Chaghoura. Saidnaya zählt zu den Kultorten 'spiritueller Konvergenz', welche in Syrien häufiger bezeugt sind<sup>8</sup>. Die Partizipation verschiedener Glaubensrichtungen am Kult attestierte die Heiligkeit des Ortes und verweist zugleich auf eine anerkannte Glaubenspraxis bei den Vertretern der drei monotheistischen Religionen. An der Kultpraxis und am Gebrauch der Ikone lässt sich ablesen, welche Anschauungen sich mit ihr verbanden. "Im öffentlichen Bereich des Heiligenkults ließ sich der Heilige über seine Lebenszeit oder über den Umkreis seines Grabes hinaus nur repräsentieren durch Bilder, in denen er nach seinem Tode und auch an anderen Orten verehrt werden konnte: Bilder erfüllten hier die gleichen Erwartungen, die man selbst an den lebenden Heiligen richtete, nämlich zu helfen und Wunder zu tun"<sup>9</sup>. Theologisch stand die Verehrung von Kultbildern dem mosaischen Bilderverbot entgegen und war als Ausdruck heidnischen Götzendienstes verpönt. So waren im christlichen Kultraum bis ins 6. Jahrhundert sowie in der Zeit des Ikonoklasmus im 8./9. Jahrhundert Bilder nicht überall zugelassen.

<sup>7</sup> Walter von Marangiers kam anlässlich des Waffenstillstands zwischen Raymond von Tripoli und Salah ad-Din 1185 frei, von der Wallfahrtsstätte dürfte er während der Kriegszüge erfahren haben; Bacci 2006, 2-3; Devos 1947, 273, 275-278; Kedar 2001, 93-94.

<sup>8</sup> Meri 1999; *idem* 2002; Kedar 2001, 89-90; Weltecke 2012, 76.

<sup>9</sup> Belting 2011, 55. Nach Hans Belting gilt die Verehrung von Marienikonen als "markantes Beispiel für die Kontinuität des Bildgebrauches in vorchristlicher und christlicher Zeit", ebd., 52. Vermutet wird auch in Saidnaya eine antike Kultstätte; Immerzeel 2017, 242.



Auch wenn es im Islam und Judentum Vorbehalte gegenüber Wundern gab, wurde die Verehrung von Heiligen und entsprechende Kulthandlungen von muslimischen und jüdischen Theologen jedoch kaum kontrolliert<sup>10</sup>. Über die religiöse Funktion hinaus erfüllten interreligiöse Kultorte noch weitere Funktionen: “Pilgrimage sites were also centres of social and economic activity where people came together for religious observance and economic opportunity, particularly at celebrations of holy days and saints’ days. (...) Jews, Muslims, and Christians interacted, commented on each other’s piety, employed similar frames of mind and expectations from the encounter”<sup>11</sup>.

Die Bedeutung Saidnayas als multireligiöser *locus sanctus*, der schlechte Zustand der Ikone, die Ende des 12. Jahrhunderts ausgeformten und verbreiteten Legenden und Wundererzählungen um die Chaghoura sowie nicht zuletzt ihre Platzierung in der Apsis der Hauptkirche des Klosterkomplexes<sup>12</sup> sind Indizien, welche auf ein höheres Alter der Ikone und auf eine längere – zunächst lokale und regionale – Tradition der Verehrung hinweisen<sup>13</sup>. Anzunehmen ist ferner, dass das Kloster neben der religiösen eine politisch-gesellschaftliche Funktion erfüllte, welche im muslimisch-christlichen Grenzraum in unterschiedlichen historischen Phasen einem Wandel unterlag. Auch wenn die Kontrolle der Wunder- bzw. Ölproduktion zuvörderst dem Kloster oblag, ist die Förderung und Intensivierung des Kultes kaum ohne das Einvernehmen mit den muslimischen Oberherren (Zengiden 1154-1174, Ayyubiden 1174-1260) denkbar, welche seit 1154 in der nahen Hauptstadt Damaskus residierten und ihren Herrschaftssitz zu einem Zentrum des Islams ausbauten. Da Franken und Templer schon beinahe hundert Jahre in der Nachbarschaft Saidnayas lebten, steht das Einsetzen der Berichterstattung “out of the blue”<sup>14</sup> voraussichtlich ebenfalls mit einem Wandel oder einer Erweiterung der gesellschaftlich-politischen Funktion des Klosters in Verbindung.

Die Entwicklung des Kultes sowie die Existenz- und Rahmenbedingungen des Mirakels von Saidnaya im Spannungsfeld von geistlichen und weltlichen Bedürfnissen der verschiedenen christlichen und muslimischen Interessengruppen werden in den Quellen allerdings kaum thematisiert und lassen sich nur indirekt erschließen. Einige Anhaltspunkte in Hinblick auf die bislang nicht behandelte Frage nach den Hintergründen des Kultes in der muslimisch-christlichen Kontaktzone bieten der Bericht des staufischen Gesandten Burchard

von Straßburg und die Beschreibung Saidnayas in der ‘Geschichte der Kirchen und Klöster Ägyptens’ Abū l-Makārims. In beiden Fällen handelt es sich um Augenzeugenberichte aus der Phase vor Einsetzen der Überlieferung durch westliche Pilger, also vermutlich noch vor Beginn der überregionalen Wallfahrt<sup>15</sup>. Aufgrund ihrer spezifischen Perspektive auf die Chaghoura und das Ölwunder liefern beide Autoren wertvolle Informationen über die Ikone, welche weitreichende Schlüsse auf die Entwicklung des Kultes und die am Kult beteiligten Interessengruppen erlauben.

Burchard reiste im Auftrag Friedrichs I. Barbarossa im Jahr 1175/1176 in den Herrschaftsbereich Salah ad-Dins nach Ägypten und Syrien und hielt seine Beobachtungen in einem Gesandtschaftsbericht fest<sup>16</sup>. Während Lateineuropäern in dieser Zeit generell der Zugang ins Landesinnere Syriens (und auch Ägyptens) untersagt war, besuchte Burchard das Kloster Saidnaya im offiziellen Rahmen des Gesandtenaustausches. Seine Aufzeichnungen sind der älteste erhaltene Nachweis über das Kloster und den hier stattfindenden Kult überhaupt überhaupt<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Meri 2002, 122. “Fundamental rituals, such as making votive offerings, lightning candles, prostrating before or kissing a shrine were not expressly pagan, Jewish, Christian, or Muslim. Within the multi-faith environment of the Near East natural similarities existed in practice” (Meri 2002, 124; Talmon-Heller 2007, 199-202).

<sup>11</sup> Meri 2002, 123.

<sup>12</sup> “(...) the icon’s location within the true auratic centre of the building epitomized Saydnaya’s status as an extraordinary and independent holy place, being subject solely to the Virgin Mary”; Bacci 2006, 9. Siehe auch Immerzeel 2007, 18-19; *idem* 2017, 227, 238.

<sup>13</sup> Immerzeel 2007, 16; *idem* 2009, 45.

<sup>14</sup> Immerzeel 2009, 44.

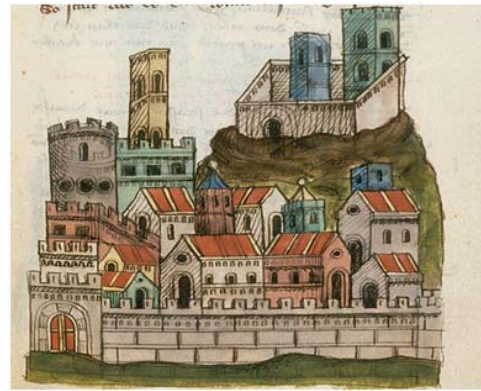
<sup>15</sup> Aus dieser Phase ist zudem eine von Daniel Baraz in das Jahr 1183 datierte Darstellung in einem arabischen Manuskript aus dem Sinaikloster existent, welche chronologisch und inhaltlich den missing link einer lange vermuteten arabischen Vorlage der späteren lateinischen Berichte darstellt (enthalten in Mt. Sinai Ar. 585, ff. 50r-59v); Baraz 1995, 183; siehe auch Atiyya 1955. Abou Samra vermutet hinter dem arabischen Text eine syrische Vorlage; Abou Samra 2007, 655-658.

<sup>16</sup> Thomsen 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Die erste Untersuchung der Schriften zu Saidnaya stammt von Gaston Raynaud, der das *Miracle de Sainte Marie der Sardenai* des Gautier de Coincy publizierte und Burchard auch als älteste Quelle nennt, Raynaud 1882; *idem* 1885. In der Forschung wurde Burchards Bericht selten als authentisch beurteilt, vgl. Devos 1947, 262. Baraz (1195) gibt den Bericht des Guy Chat als den ältesten an. Abou Samra hält Thietmar für den ersten lateinischen Besucher (Abou Samra 2007, 661, 668).



Pl. 2. Marienkappelle im Marienkloster Saidnaya (<https://biscobreak.altervista.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/MADONNA-DI-SaidNAYA-venerazione.jpg>; letzter Zugriff am 18.9.2018).



Pl. 3. Saidnaya, Miniatur aus Ms. Egerton 1900, f. 94r (1467), London, British Library (<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=7667>; letzter Zugriff am 31.07. 2017).



Pl. 4. Miniatur aus *Miracles de Notre Dame* von Gautier de Coincy (ca. 1411-1412), Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. Fr. 2810, f. 171v (<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b52000858n/f345.image>, letzter Zugriff am 16.12.2017).



Pl. 5. Drawing of the Miracle of the icon of Saydnaya by Nicolò Brancalone; Manuskript in das *Tabbāba Māryām* Kloster, Äthiopien; 1508-1520s (Chojnacki 1983, Fig. 185c).

Aus dem gleichen Zeitraum (zwischen 1160 und 1187) stammt höchstwahrscheinlich auch die Darstellung Saidnayas im ersten Teil der *Geschichte der Kirchen und Klöster Ägyptens* Abū l-Makārims, überliefert im arabischen Manuskript 2570 (ff. 142f.) der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek München<sup>18</sup>. Dieser Teil enthält sonst kürzere Notizen über Kirchen und Klöster in Ägypten und Kleinasien, Saidnaya

wird im Vergleich ausführlicher beschrieben. Der Zweck der Aufzeichnungen bestand in einer Bestandsaufnahme christlicher Stätten innerhalb des islamischen Herrschaftsraumes, geordnet nach geographischen Gesichtspunkten. Ein zweiter Teil beinhaltet noch Beschreibungen Griechenlands, Konstantinopels, Roms, Nubiens und Äthiopiens<sup>19</sup>. Der koptische *archon* Abū l-Makārims war nicht der alleinige Autor dieses 'topographischen Handbuchs', die Beobachtungen in Saidnaya gehen möglicherweise auf Anba Michael, Bischof von Damiette (1184)<sup>20</sup> oder auf Ali b Ubayd, den nestorianischen Bischof von Damaskus, zurück<sup>21</sup>.

Abgesehen von dem frühen Berichtszeitpunkt weisen die Texte Burchards und Abū l-Makārims weitere gemeinsame Merkmale auf, welche sie von der späteren Überlieferung unterscheiden. So stehen

<sup>18</sup> Den Heijer, 1996, 77-81; *idem* 1993; Den Heijer/Pilette 2012; Troupeau 2005, 573; Zanetti 1995; 'Abu Al-Makarim', *CE* 1, 23 (entry A.S. Atiya).

<sup>19</sup> Den Heijer 1996, 77; den Heijer/Pilette 2012, 985.

<sup>20</sup> Nasrallah 1988, 249.

<sup>21</sup> Troupeau 2005, 577. Zudem sind in der *Geschichte der Kirchen und Klöster Ägyptens* insgesamt vier Schichten der Überarbeitungen und Hinzufügungen zu identifizieren (Den Heijer 1996, 78-80).

die späteren arabischen und lateinischen Berichte in einem Traditionszusammenhang und konzentrieren sich auf die von der Chaghoura bewirkten Mirakel. Während bei den Pilger- und Reiseberichten der Interessenschwerpunkt auf dem Beweis der Authentizität der Chaghoura mittels Wundererzählungen lag und eine zertifizierende Berichtsfunktion festzustellen ist, sparen Burchard und Abū l-Makārim in ihren Beschreibungen legendenhafte Elemente weitgehend aus<sup>22</sup>. Die Selektion des für sie relevanten Wissens resultiert aus der Absicht, aktuelles Wissen über den Ort zu erfassen und sachlich festzuhalten.

Nach Burchards Darstellung befand sich die Ikone hinter dem Altar der Klosterkirche und war hinter Gitterstäben in einem Fenster in der Mauer des Sanktuariums angebracht. Die Maße gibt Burchard mit einer Elle in der Höhe (ca. 50 cm) und einer halben Elle in der Breite an. Bei Abū l-Makārim beträgt die Höhe ca. 40 cm, die Breite eher 15-18 cm, doch sind beide Angaben miteinander kompatibel, da es sich um variable Größenangaben und Schätzwerte handelt<sup>23</sup>. Anhand der Maße ist anzunehmen, dass die Ikone (als Brustbild) Lebensgröße anstrebte, um dem Betrachter den Eindruck einer persönlichen Begegnung mit der abgebildeten Person zu suggerieren<sup>24</sup>.

Burchard zufolge zeigte die Ikone das Bildnis der Maria, welches auf wundersame Weise zu Fleisch geworden war. Das Jesuskind erwähnt er nicht. Ob er das Marienmotiv mitsamt seiner Fleischwerdung tatsächlich erkannte, wird nicht deutlich. Das Ölwunder bestätigt er indes visuell und olfaktorisch:

*In der Kirche sah ich ein auf Holz gemaltes Bild, welches eine Elle lang und eine halbe Elle breit war. Es steht im Altarraum hinter dem Altar in einer Wandnische und ist durch ein Eisengitter gesichert, welches wie eine Täfelung verziert ist. Auf dem Holzbild war einst die selige Jungfrau Maria abgebildet. Doch ist das Bildnis auf dem Holz dann zu Fleisch geworden, was wie ein Wunder erscheint, und ständig fließt duftendes Öl aus ihm heraus, dessen Wohlgeruch noch den von Balsam übertrifft<sup>25</sup>.*

Die Ikone durfte von allen Besuchern der Kirche betrachtet werden, eine Berührung war jedoch untersagt und ohnehin durch die Anbringung der Ikone erschwert<sup>26</sup>. Für den Schutz und die Vergabe des Öls war ein Geistlicher (*christiano*) zuständig.

Detaillierter als Burchard gibt Abū l-Makārim den Standort der Chaghoura in einer Nische der Apsis an<sup>27</sup>. Seinen Informationen gemäß lag die Ikone nicht ganz waagrecht auf einem Marmorbecken, wobei das obere Bildende erhöht war:

*(...) derrière la grille, se trouve aussi une urne de marbre blanc comme un bassin carré, peut-être d'un empan de long pas plus, sur quatre doigts, de large ou un peu plus, sur laquelle repose une icône non dressée, le sommet de l'icône étant du côté sud, plus haut que sa base du côté nord, de quatre doigts ou moins<sup>28</sup>.*

Der Zugang war streng reguliert, der Blick auf die Chaghoura nur im Beisein von Priestern gestattet, welche die Türen des Armariums öffneten<sup>29</sup>. Auf der Ikone selbst war kein Bildnis mehr zu erkennen: "on n'y distingue pas d'image (...) elle est de couleur rouge pâle"<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Dies gilt bei Abū l-Makārim nur für diesen Abschnitt; den Heijer/Pilette 2012, 985.

<sup>23</sup> "(...) l'icône est épaisse de plus de deux doigts joints, longue d'un empan et large de quatre doigts" (Troupeau 2005, 577); vgl. Immerzeel 2007, 17-18; *idem* 2017, 232.

<sup>24</sup> Siehe dazu Belting 2011, 23-26.

<sup>25</sup> "In qua ecclesia vidi tabulam ligneam ad mensuram unius ulne longam et latam ad modum dimidie ulne. Retro altare in muro sanctuarii in fenestra positam, et ferro laqueariter cancellatim firmatam. In qua tabula effigies beate \*Virginis Marie\* aliquando depicta fuit, sed nunc, quod dictu mirabile est, pictura super lignum est incarnata et oleum odoriferum super odorem balsami incessanter ex ea manat" (Thomsen 2018, 526).

<sup>26</sup> "\*Nec\* predicta tabula a \*quoquam\* tangi audetur, videri autem omnibus hominibus conceditur" (Thomsen 2018, 526).

<sup>27</sup> "(...) derrière l'abside de l'église, il y a une chambre carrée ayant deux portes et une abside; dans l'abside il y a une fenêtre de trois empan de long sur deux empan de large, sur laquelle est posée une grande grille de fer (...)" (Troupeau 2005, 576).

<sup>28</sup> Troupeau 2005, 576.

<sup>29</sup> "(...) dans cette grille, il y a une porte à deux battants, plaquée de cuivre jaune, entièrement ajourée, avec quatre croix; cette porte est fermée et elle n'est ouverte qu'en présence des prêtres chargés du service de l'église; devant cette fenêtre, se trouve une colonne sur laquelle il y a une lampe qui ne s'éteint ni la nuit, ni le jour; lorsque la porte fut ouverte, je vis, à l'intérieur de la fenêtre, des voiles de lin, blancs et déchirés" (Troupeau 2005, 576).

<sup>30</sup> Schon Ende des 12. Jahrhunderts ist damit der schlechte Zustand bezeugt, den nachfolgende Reisende beklagen, "(...) sed est tam nigra prae vetustate et oculis effecta, quod vix imago discerni potest, sed modicum rubei coloris adhuc cernitur in vestimentis depictis" bemängelt Ludolf von Suchem (Deycks 1851, 99). Im 15. Jahrhundert wurde die Ikone mit Tüchern bedeckt; siehe Schefer 1892, 65.



Auf die Inkarnation geht Abū l-Makārim nicht ein. Die Fleischwerdung oder Wesensveränderung eines Bildes war mit der theologischen Rechtfertigung der Bilderverehrung in der Ostkirche aber vereinbar. Im Abbild wurde die Person der oder des Abgebildeten verehrt. Die existentielle Verbindung von Urbild und Abbild rechtfertigte erst die Verehrung des Bildes – mehr noch: „Beim Bild handelte es sich um die Inkarnation der Form in der Materie. (...) Die Bilder waren quasi personale Wesen geworden, ontologisch aufgewertet durch eine Bildmetaphysik, deren Wurzeln in den heidnischen Neoplatonismus zurückreichen“<sup>31</sup>. Festgehalten wurde dieser Anspruch des Bildes „als Instrument des Heilswerks“ im 3. Kanon des Konzils

von 869/870, auf dem der Ikonoklasmus ein weiteres Mal nach dem Konzil von Nicäa (787) verurteilt wurde<sup>32</sup>. Entsprechend waren die Darstellungsformen festgelegt, normgebend war das (Ur-)Bild des oder der Repräsentierten<sup>33</sup>. Diese Bildtheologie zugrunde gelegt, bedurfte es keiner Erwähnung einer sichtbaren Inkarnation, die schon im Anspruch der Ikone, Maria abzubilden, impliziert war<sup>34</sup>. Womöglich ist daher die Angabe der hellroten Farbe der Ikone bei Abū l-Makārim als Hinweis auf die in der Volksfrömmigkeit vorhandene Vorstellung einer physischen Inkarnation zu lesen, von der er sich distanzierte. Freilich kann die Glaubwürdigkeit dieser Beobachtung nicht bestätigt werden. Ähnliche Angaben bei späteren Autoren können ebenso auf tradierten Zuschreibungen beruhen – zumal auch Jean de Mandeville in seiner fiktiven Reisebeschreibung die roten Farbspuren erwähnt<sup>35</sup>.

Über den Erwerb der Ikone schweigt Abū l-Makārim, gibt aber den Evangelisten Lukas als Urheber der Ikone an, der hier die Galaktotrophousa oder Hodegetria abbildete:

*L'église de Notre-Dame la Vierge pure, où se trouve une icône sur laquelle est représentée son image, peinte par le disciple Luc l'Évangéliste et exécutée de sa main, du vivant de la Vierge; cette icône était dépourvue de l'image du Christ, alors qu'elle le portait; quand Notre-Dame la pure la vit, elle la trouva belle, mais dit à Luc: 'Cette image est sans force: peins sur elle l'image de Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ dans mon sein'; après cela, elle vit l'icône et dit: 'Maintenant, il me semble qu'il y a une force en elle'<sup>36</sup>.*

Mit dem Rückgriff auf die Lukaslegende wird die Ikone als historisches Portrait ausgewiesen, in dem die Privilegierung gerade dieser Ikone durch die „ontologische Beziehung zwischen Abbild und Original“ von Beginn an angelegt ist<sup>37</sup>. Gesteigert wird die Authentizitätsbehauptung durch den Willen Marias, das Bild durch das Jesuskind zu ergänzen. Zugleich kann mittels der Äußerung Marias dem Einwand entgegnet werden, wie denn Lukas das Jesuskind als Portrait gemalt haben sollte<sup>38</sup>. Das widergegebene Gespräch zwischen Lukas und Maria ist in der „Ordnung des Priestertums“ enthalten<sup>39</sup>, einem um das Jahr 1000 entstandenen liturgischen Handbuch der Koptischen Kirche, welches Argumente für die Bilderverehrung

<sup>31</sup> Dagron 2007, 125, 157-158; Belting 2011, 174.

<sup>32</sup> Dagron 2007, 190; Belting 2011, 172-174. Zum Bilderstreit siehe zuletzt Brubaker 2012; Brubaker/Haldon 2011.

<sup>33</sup> Belting 2011, 165-166.

<sup>34</sup> Anders begründet Garosi das weitgehende Fehlen der Inkarnation in der arabisch-christlichen Tradition mit dem islamischen Umfeld, das die Anbetung eines Objektes, v. a. aber den Glauben an eine göttliche Substanz als Häresie und Götzendienst verdammt (Garosi 2015, 345). Da die Inkarnation in dem auf das Jahr 1183 datierten Manuskript des Sinaiklosters (Ar. 585) genannt wird, ist aber davon auszugehen, dass die Fleischwerdung ebenso wie das Öl Wunder und die Wundertätigkeit der Chaghoura zu den ursprünglichen Elementen der Legende im Orient zählten und nicht erst in der westlichen Tradition hinzugefügt wurden (Garosi 2015, 344).

<sup>35</sup> Vgl. Immerzeel 2017, 16. Zu Mandeville siehe u. a. Ridder 1992; Seymour 1994.

<sup>36</sup> Troupeau 2005, 577.

<sup>37</sup> Belting 2011, 60.

<sup>38</sup> Belting 2011, 71.

<sup>39</sup> „Der Evangelist war neben seiner Tätigkeit als Arzt auch Maler. Als dies unsere Herrin, die Jungfrau Maria, von ihm erfahren hatte, sagte sie zu ihm, 'O Lukas, willst du mich nicht auf eine Tafel malen, damit ein Erinnerungszeichen bleibt für das Bildnis meines Gesichtes nach meinem Weggang aus dieser Welt?' Lukas sagte zu ihr, 'Ja, meine Herrin'. Er ging hin und malte das Bild der Jungfrau Maria auf eine Tafel von Holz, in dem sie stand und brachte das Bild unserer lieben Frau, der Herrin. Da sagte sie zu ihm, 'O Lukas, male mich auf eine andere Art!' Da ging Lukas hin und malte sie sitzend, mit der Wollspindel in der Hand, und brachte das Bild zur Jungfrau. Als sie es sah, war sie nicht zufrieden mit jenem Bild. Da sagte Lukas zur Jungfrau, 'O meine Herrin, wie möchtest du denn am liebsten, dass ich dein Bild male?' Da sagte die Jungfrau zu ihm, 'Male mich sitzend, so dass mein lieber Sohn auf meinem Schoß und meine Brust in seinem preiswürdigen Mund ist!' Da ging Lukas hin und tat, wie ihm seine reine Herrin, die heilige Maria, geboten hatte. (...) Es befindet sich jetzt in der Stadt Konstantinopel“ (Assfalg 1955, 93-94).

enthält<sup>40</sup>. Die Lukaslegende rechtfertigte gegenüber den Bilderfeinden "ein bereits existierendes Bild als Dokument und Reliquie"<sup>41</sup>. Die Ursprünge dieser Legende sind nicht geklärt, sie gehen vermutlich auf das 6. Jahrhundert zurück<sup>42</sup>. Mit Zunahme des Marienkultes wuchs seitdem die aktive Rolle Mariens, die selbst ein Bild guthieß und segnete. Mit der Erwähnung der Lukaslegende bei Abū l-Makārim ergibt sich ein Bezug zur Zeit des Ikonoklasmus, doch bleibt der genaue Zeitpunkt der Herstellung bzw. des Erwerbs der Chaghoura fraglich.

Von der Lukaslegende weiß Burchard nicht. Seinen Informationen nach wurde die Ikone einst in Konstantinopel angefertigt, ein nicht näher benannter Patriarch habe sie von dort nach Jerusalem überführt, wo sich die Äbtissin des Saidnayaklosters das Bild erbat und es in das Kloster brachte:

*Erwähnt werden muss auch, dass dieses Bild einst in Konstantinopel zu Ehren der Heiligen Jungfrau hergestellt und bemalt wurde. Von dort brachte es ein Patriarch nach Jerusalem. Just zu dieser Zeit war die Äbtissin des Klosters nach Jerusalem gereist, um dort zu beten, und erhielt von dem Patriarchen das Bild, welches sie in ihre Kirche transportierte. Dies geschah im Jahr \*870\*<sup>43</sup>.*

Burchards Version der Herkunftserzählung der Chaghoura begegnet in keiner weiteren Quelle. Im Westen wird sonst sehr selten von der Herstellung des Bildes in Konstantinopel erzählt<sup>44</sup>. Im Autograph des Burchardberichtes war das Jahr für den Erwerb der Ikone präzise angegeben, doch ist die ursprüngliche Jahreszahl aufgrund der differierenden Angaben in den verschiedenen Textzeugen des Berichtes nicht mehr eindeutig zu ermitteln. Neben dem Jahr 870 finden sich die Angaben 370 und 178<sup>45</sup>. Mit höherer Wahrscheinlichkeit hat in den Hyparchetypen des Burchardberichtes das Jahr 870 gestanden, da in den Textzeugen, welche das Jahr mit 370 anzeigen, der Angabe *anno incarnationis* das Wort *Domini* (D) hinzugefügt ist. Zwar konnte umgekehrt auch das *D(omini)* zur Jahreszahl werden, doch würde ein Erwerb der Ikone im 4. Jahrhundert noch vor der mutmaßlichen Gründung des Klosters im 6. Jahrhundert liegen. Keine der Zahlen lässt sich durch unabhängige Quellen bestätigen, da die Jahresangaben auch in den wenigen weiteren arabischen und lateinischen Zeugnissen der Legende variieren. Zwar ist eine Verbindung zu einer arabischen Version der Legende, in der das

Translationsdatum der Ikone in der Zeitrechnung nach Alexander dem Großen mit 1370 (= 1059 n. C.) angegeben ist, nicht auszuschließen<sup>46</sup>. Doch finden sich in arabischen Texten ebenso die Zahlen 1202 oder 1373<sup>47</sup> nach Alexander dem Großen als Jahreszahl des Erwerbs (= 901 bzw. 1061 n. Chr.). Da Burchards Darstellung deutlich von der späteren Überlieferung über Saidnaya abweicht und er sich bei der Abfassung seines Berichtes insgesamt kaum auf schriftliche Vorlagen stützte, spricht wenig dafür, dass er die Zahl aus einer schriftlichen Vorlage übernahm. Vielmehr ist davon auszugehen, dass ihm das Jahr 870 mitgeteilt wurde bzw. er es so verstand oder selbst umrechnete.

<sup>40</sup> Assfalg 1955, 93-94; Langener 1996, 252-253; Troupeau 2007, 452. Die erhaltene Textfassung stammt aus der ersten Hälfte des 13. Jahrhunderts (Assfalg 1955, XXIII). Der Autor Anba Sawirus Ibn al-Muqaffa ist hingegen nicht der Verfasser der Alexandrinischen Patriarchengeschichte (den Heijer 1996, 72).

<sup>41</sup> Belting 2011, 70-72; Schreiner 1994, 257.

<sup>42</sup> Seinen Ursprung hat die Lukaslegende möglicherweise bereits in der Antike, schriftlich ist sie zuerst bei Andreas von Kreta († 740) belegt; Bacci 2004, 432-435; Belting 2011, 70-72. Ca. 70 Bilder wurden in der Zeit nach Beendigung des Bilderstreits auf Lukas zurückgeführt. Erst im 15. Jahrhundert wird die Ikone auch im Westen dem Evangelisten Lukas zugeschrieben.

<sup>43</sup> "Nota, hec tabula Constantinopoli primo facta et depicta fuit in honore beate Virginis. Inde a quodam patriarcha in Ierusalem perducta fuit. Tunc temporis quedam abbatissa supra dicti loci causa orationis Ierusalem descenderat, et impetrata tabula a patriarcha Ierosolymitano, eam secum ad ecclesiam sibi commissam transportavit. Fuit autem hoc incarnationis anno \*870\*" (Thomsen 2018, 526).

<sup>44</sup> Zwar wurde Bischof Arculf im 6. Jahrhundert eine ölspendende Ikone in Konstantinopel gezeigt, doch steht diese wohl in keiner direkten Verbindung zur Chaghoura.

<sup>45</sup> Das Jahr 870 steht in der Überlieferung durch Arnold von Lübeck, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Ms. lat. fol. 296ff.; im MS Vat. Lat. 1058 sowie in drei weiteren gekürzten Versionen des Berichts; das Jahr 370 findet sich im MS Wien Cod. 362; 178 in einem Handschriftenfragment der Universität München; Lehmann 1940, 68.

<sup>46</sup> Aufgrund der Ähnlichkeit der lateinischen Schreibweisen der Zahl MCCCLXX mit CCCLXX oder DCCCLXX könnte die Jahresangabe auf dieser arabischen Vorlage basieren. Die Angabe 1370 begegnet in einer Abschrift aus einem Manuskript von 1849, kollationiert mit einer Abschrift von 1501; Cheikh 1905, 466; Peeters 1906, 152-153. Devos führt diese Version auf eine Vorlage des 13. Jahrhunderts zurück (Devos 1947, 245, 271). Große Ähnlichkeiten bestehen zu dem bislang frühesten arabischen Zeugnis der Legende aus dem Jahr 1183, welches bislang jedoch nicht ediert ist; Baraz 1995, 184-185.

<sup>47</sup> Abou Samra 2007, 649, 635-655; Cerulli 1943, 236, 240; Devos 1947, 251, 271 Anm. 1.

Eine ungefähre Übereinstimmung seiner Jahresangabe findet sich in der lateinischen Redaktion MS Vat. Lat. 44 des Mirakelberichts, welcher auf einer arabischen Vorlage aus dem Archiv des Klosters beruht<sup>48</sup>. Zwar nicht für den Erwerb der Ikone, sondern für den Beginn des Wunders, ist dort ein Zeitpunkt "vor mehr als 300 Jahren" angegeben: *CCC aut plus anni impleti quam primum relevata est ista yconia gloriosa* ("vor mehr als 300 Jahren ereignete sich das Wunder dieser berühmten Ikone zum ersten Mal")<sup>49</sup>. Die lateinische Abschrift entstand vermutlich um 1200, die arabische Vorlage etwas früher, so dass auch hier auf das Ende des 9. Jahrhunderts Bezug genommen wird. Der Erwerb der Ikone im späten neunten Jahrhundert nach Ende des Bildverbots (843) ist durchaus denkbar. Das Jahr 870 legt ferner eine Verbindung zu der Synode von 869/870 nahe, an der Vertreter aller Patriarchen in Konstantinopel teilnahmen<sup>50</sup>. Nicht auszuschließen ist, dass Elias von Jerusalem bei dieser Gelegenheit tatsächlich eine Ikone aus Konstantinopel nach Jerusalem brachte. Möglicherweise wurde die Ikone auch schon während des Ikonoklasmus fernab von Konstantinopel in Sicherheit gebracht<sup>51</sup>.

Die Ölabsonderung setzte erst nach Erwerb der Ikone ein (*sed postea per multa tempora cepit oleum sacrum ex ea manare*) und kam den Vertretern aller drei monotheistischen Religionen zu Gute: "Durch dieses Öl werden viele Christen, Muslime und Juden häufig von unterschiedlichsten Leiden erlöst."<sup>52</sup> Die Wirkkraft bezog sich Abū l-Makārim

zufolge vornehmlich auf eine bestimmte Auswahl körperlicher und psychischer Leiden. Heilung erfolgte jedoch nur unter der Bedingung und in Abhängigkeit des festen Glaubens an die Heilige Jungfrau: "(...) cette huile bénite est utile contre toutes les maladies (...), par elle, beaucoup de gens sont guéris de l'épilepsie chronique, du tremblement et de la palpitation, dans la mesure de leur foi en la puissance de Notre-Dame la Vierge pure"<sup>53</sup>.

Ausführlich beschreibt Abū l-Makārim die Gewinnung des Öls: "(...) elle secrète de l'huile, sans interruption, dans cette urne qui se remplit d'huile et ne diminue pas, même si l'on en prend autant qu'il se peut, et ne déborde pas si l'on n'en prend pas". Die Menge des Öls erscheint ihm dabei verdächtig groß, zumal der zuständige Priester ihm bestätigte, dass schon an normalen Tagen 50 Ampullen pro Stunde gefüllt würden, ganz zu schweigen von den Feiertagen:

(...) le prêtre chargé du service de ce lieu, d'ouvrir et de fermer la porte, me dit: Mon frère, si tu assistais à la fête de Notre-Dame à l'époque des raisins (le 8 septembre), tu verrais le miracle se produire; car en ce jour, il se rassemble, comme Chrétiens, Musulmans, Nestoriens, Melkites, Syriaques et autres, environ quatre à cinq mille personnes; or aucune d'elles ne repart sans emporter avec elle trois ampoules, et certaines plus de trois, et ce bassin ne diminue en rien; ne t'étonne donc pas de cette petite quantité que tu as vu prendre, car celle-ci, par rapport à celle-là, est très minime<sup>54</sup>.

Angebot und Nachfrage waren exakt aufeinander abgestimmt. Der Inhalt jeder Ampulle betrug drei Löffel Öl, was einem Volumen von mindestens 15 ml entsprechen dürfte<sup>55</sup>. Angenommen, der Priester nannte Abū l-Makārim annähernd korrekte Zahlen, dann sonderte die Chaghoura an 'normalen' Tagen mindestens einen Liter Öl pro Stunde ab. An den hoch frequentierten Marienfeiertagen müssten dann 200-300 Liter Öl, abgefüllt in ca. 15.000 Glasphiolen bereitgestellt worden sein. Verwunderung löste die außerordentliche Produktivität der Ikone auch bei Burchard aus, der sonst kein persönliches Interesse an deren Wundertätigkeit äußerte: "Und niemals verringert sich die Menge dieses Öls, soviel man auch daraus entnimmt"<sup>56</sup>.

Weder Burchard noch Abū l-Makārim kamen als Pilger mit der Hoffnung auf Heilung an diesen Ort, bezeugen aber weitgehend übereinstimmend

<sup>48</sup> "Ista translata sunt de armario Sardani veraci stilo scripta"; MS Vat. Lat. 44, 73v (BHL 5409). Siehe auch Ciggaar 2005, 80-81.

<sup>49</sup> MS Vat. Lat. 44, 73v; vgl. Devos 1947, 249, 251.

<sup>50</sup> Dagron 2007, 188.

<sup>51</sup> Die These Devos, dass die Ikone 1059 erworben wurde, kann beim jetzigen Forschungsstand nicht widerlegt werden, doch ergeben sich neben der Quellenlage auch aus dem historischen Kontext Zweifel an dem Datum.

<sup>52</sup> "De quo oleo multi Christiani, Sarraceni et Iudei de diversis languoribus sepe liberantur" (Thomsen 2018, 526).

<sup>53</sup> Troupeau 2005, 577.

<sup>54</sup> Troupeau 2005, 577.

<sup>55</sup> "(...) l'huile que l'on prend est mise dans une petite ampoule de verre, et l'on verse dans chacune trois cuillerées de cette huile, au moyen d'une cuillère plongée dans l'urne" (Troupeau 2005, 577). Das Volumen eines modernen Teelöffels beträgt ca. 5 ml, dasjenige eines Eßlöffels 15 ml. Eine offizielle Einheit gibt es nicht.

<sup>56</sup> "Et oleum illud nunquam minuitur, quantumcumque inde accipiat" (Thomsen 2018, 526).



die kultische Inszenierung der Chaghoura. Die Chaghoura erfüllte die Funktion einer Reliquie und stellte ihre Leistungsfähigkeit für alle sichtbar unter Beweis. Abū l-Makārims Informationen stammten wahrscheinlich von höhergestellten Geistlichen, denen vor allem daran lag, die Authentizität der Chaghoura und die Legitimität des Kultes mit Verweis auf Lukas zu untermauern. Der gezielt propagierte Archaismus der Chaghoura in der Ursprungslegende zusammen mit der Ritualisierung und Inszenierung der Glaubenspraxis verbürgten ihre privilegierte Stellung, auf die andere Bilder keinen Anspruch hatten. Nur authentische Bilder waren zum Handeln befähigt<sup>57</sup>.

Burchard erhielt seine Informationen von seinen muslimischen und eventuell auch melkitischen oder koptischen Begleitern, welche ihn und seine Gesandtschaft vielleicht sogar schon seit seinem Aufenthalt in Fustat betreuten. Allerdings enthält der Bericht keinerlei Angaben über Begleitpersonen, Gewährleute und weitere Teilnehmer der Gesandtschaft. Abgesehen von seiner Augenzeugenschaft des Ölwunders liefert Burchard auch keinen weiteren Authentizitätsbeweis der Ikone und der Rechtmäßigkeit ihrer Verehrung. Die Legitimität des Kultes wird bei ihm insbesondere durch die effektive Heilskraft des Öls und die multireligiöse Verehrung bestätigt, was als Hinweis auf muslimische Informanten gedeutet werden kann. “Unlike in Christianity, the process of recognizing a saint in Islam was both personal and informal as it was often based on the popular consensus of common people and disciples and their interaction with saints”<sup>58</sup>.

Von der religionsübergreifenden Verehrung der Ikone berichtet auch Abū l-Makārīm. Die Teilnahme von Muslimen an der Zeremonie scheint ihm selbstverständlich, Juden erwähnt er im Unterschied zu Burchard nicht. Sein Augenmerk gilt den verschiedenen christlichen Gläubigen: Er differenziert Nestorianer, Melkiten, Syrer und andere, nennt aber keine römisch-katholischen Pilger. Dagegen hebt Burchard besonders die Präsenz der Muslime hervor, welche an diesen Tagen “mit großer Andacht” Opfergaben zu Ehren Mariens darbrachten:

*An Mariä Himmelfahrt sowie an Mariä Geburt kommen alle Muslime und Christen dieser Region an diesem Ort zum Beten zusammen, und die Muslime bringen mit großer Andacht ihrer Opfergaben dar*<sup>59</sup>.

Juden nennt er in diesem Zusammenhang nicht, sie profitierten aber von der Heilkraft des Öls. Die Verehrung und das Darbringen von Opfergaben in der Hoffnung auf eine Segnung oder einen Gnadenerweis Mariens ist bei Muslimen durchaus plausibel. Als Mutter Jesu, der im Islam als letzter Prophet vor Muhammad gilt, ist sie von Gott ausgewählt ‘vor den Frauen aller Welt’<sup>60</sup>. Maria ist die einzige Frau, die im Koran mit Namen genannt und der eine eigene Sure zuerkannt wird<sup>61</sup>. In Übereinstimmung mit dem christlichen Glauben steht die Jungfrauengeburt<sup>62</sup>. Aufgrund dieser Sonderstellung und ihrer vorbildlichen Eigenschaften erscheint sie als eine selbständige Figur und ‘Freundin Gottes’ (*al-awliyā*)<sup>63</sup>. Neben Kahdija und Fatima zählt sie zu den wichtigsten Frauengestalten im Islam und besitzt *baraka* (Segenskraft, Segen, Heiligkeit)<sup>64</sup>. Die Übertragung von *baraka* mittels Reliquien oder anderen Objekten und damit verbundene Wunder (*karāmāt*) war dem Islam, besonders im Bereich der Volksfrömmigkeit, nicht fremd. Mit Beginn des 13. Jahrhunderts fand diese Komponente des Glaubens breite Akzeptanz<sup>65</sup>.

Burchard und Abū l-Makārīm beschreiben den noch weitgehend lokalen Kult, der besonders an den großen Marienfeiertagen am 15. August und 8. September, den Tagen des Beginns der Weinlese, eine multireligiöse Pilgerschar aus der Umgebung anzog. Die Besucher des Klosters rekrutierten sich demnach aus dem islamischen Herrschaftsbereich der Ayyubiden, die Gegend um Saidnaya war überwiegend von Christen bewohnt. Neben ihrer Funktion als Nothelferin besaß die Chaghoura eine Funktion für den Ort Saidnaya, da sich insbesondere an

<sup>57</sup> Belting 2011, 14-24.

<sup>58</sup> Meri 2002, 66.

<sup>59</sup> “Ad illum locum in assumptione gloriose Virginis et in festo nativitatis sue omnes Sarraceni illius provincie una cum Christianis causa orandi confluunt, et Sarraceni ceremonialia sua illum offerunt cum maxima devotione” (Thomson 2018, 527).

<sup>60</sup> Koran, Sure 3, 42; Sure 21, 91. Zu Maria im Islam siehe Eißler 2009; Wensinck 1976.

<sup>61</sup> Koran, Sure 19.

<sup>62</sup> Koran, Sure 3, 45-47.

<sup>63</sup> Schleifer 1998, 95.

<sup>64</sup> “Baraka was spiritual, perceptual, and emotive, rather than conceptual. More precisely, baraka is the emanation and perpetuity of holiness of a saint, which manifests itself in objects, of persons with whom he has come into contact posthumously or during his life” (Meri 2002, 103).

<sup>65</sup> Talmon-Heller 2007, 223.

den Gedächtnisfesten Mariens die Gemeinschaft um die hier 'residierende' (Orts-) Heilige versammelte und sich gemeinsam zur ihr bekannte<sup>66</sup>.

Im Verhältnis von christlichen und muslimischen Pilgern ist eine Konkurrenz um die Gestaltungshoheit der Feierlichkeiten oder den Zugang zur Reliquie aus den Berichten nicht ersichtlich. Nach Benjamin Kedar ist das Verhältnis der Religionen in Saidnaya als „ungleiche Konvergenz“ zu beschreiben, wobei die Liturgie von einer Religion bestimmt wird, an der auch die Vertreter anderer Religionen teilnehmen<sup>67</sup>. Während die Rezipienten des Wunders multireligiös waren, oblag die Vergabe und Kontrolle des Öls einem melkitischen Priester<sup>68</sup>. Auffällig ist in diesem Zusammenhang das Fehlen syrisch-orthodoxer Zeugnisse über die Chaghoura, obwohl Pilger dieser Konfession vielfach belegt sind. Nach Dorothea Weltecke weist dies auf hierarchische Ungleichheiten hin, die „nicht immer dazu animieren, von einem Besuch dort zu erzählen“<sup>69</sup>. Ihre Macht erhielt die Chaghoura jedoch nicht von seiten der Kirche. An ihrer Sakralität hatte die kirchliche Hierarchie keinen Anteil, vielmehr stellte diese einen unmittelbaren Gnadenakt Gottes dar<sup>70</sup>. Mit der Partizipation der Muslime am Kult wurde die Verehrung der Ikone und die Teilhabe an ihrer Wirkmächtigkeit zudem in die muslimische Frömmigkeit integriert und damit partiell vereinnahmt<sup>71</sup>. Der stete Hinweis, dass das Berühren der Ikone verboten sei, ist nicht nur mit deren Schutz vor weiterer Zerstörung oder mit der Furcht vor Diebstahl zu erklären. Vor allem sollten wohl Laien, vielleicht auch Vertreter anderer Glaubensrichtungen von der Reliquie ferngehalten

werden. In jedem Fall war den Gläubigen die Möglichkeit der direkten kultischen Praxis durch Berühren und Küssen entzogen, wie es seit dem zweiten Ikonoklasmus angestrebt wurde<sup>72</sup>.

Die bei Burchard auffällige Betonung der gemeinsamen Verehrung von Christen und Muslimen, die hier beteten, spiegelt den von den ayyubidischen Gastgebern intendierten Zweck des Besuchs wieder. Der Besuch erfolgte in der Absicht, dem staufischen Gesandten Saidnaya als Ort der spirituellen Konvergenz und der friedlichen Begegnung von Muslimen und Christen zu präsentieren. Die Präsenz der hochrangigen Delegation an diesem Ort erlaubt darüber hinaus noch weitere Schlüsse in Hinblick auf die Bedeutung des Klosters und des Kultes für die islamischen Oberherren. Anscheinend besaß Salah ad-Din ein spezifisches Interesse am Kloster Saidnaya als multireligiösem *locus sanctus*. Von seiten der sunnitischen Oberherren wurde die Partizipation von Muslimen an dem Kult nicht unterbunden, eher signalisierte die Anwesenheit der herrscherlichen Elite Verbundenheit mit dem Kloster und Akzeptanz der hier praktizierten Verehrung. Die vordergründige Ehrerweisung deutet auf ein einvernehmliches hierarchisches Verhältnis zwischen Kloster und muslimischer Oberherrschaft hin. Den muslimischen Herrschern oblag der Schutz der *dimmis* sowie auch der nichtmuslimischen religiösen Einrichtungen. Schutz und Förderung religiöser Institutionen gegen Tributzahlungen sind unter Nūr ad-Dīn bezeugt<sup>73</sup>. Ein für das Sinaikloster 1175/1176 ausgestelltes Dekret belegt, dass Salah ad-Din diese Politik fortführte und Christen und ihren Einrichtungen traditionellen Schutz gewährte. Gleichzeitig forderte er erhöhte Abgaben von den *dimmis*<sup>74</sup>.

Die Verbindung zwischen muslimischer Herrschaft und Kloster wird aus der Nennung eines *Soldanus Damascenorum* im Zusammenhang mit dem Kloster und der Ikone in späteren lateinischen Zeugnissen ersichtlich<sup>75</sup>. So habe ein blinder Emir durch die Gnade der Chaghoura sein Augenlicht widererlangt und dem Kloster Öl als Dank für die Beleuchtung des Heiligtums gestiftet. Demzufolge wurde die spirituelle Konvergenz von den muslimischen Herrschern durch eigene Stiftungen befördert und lag im Interesse der gesellschaftlichen Elite. Diese konnte öffentlich ihre Frömmigkeit wie auch ihre Verbindung zu der hier zusammenkommenden Bevölkerung demonstrieren. Ausgehend vom Faktum des Besuchs der staufisch-ayyubidischen Delegation in Saidnaya erscheint selbst der Besuch Salah

<sup>66</sup> Dazu Belting 2011, 23-24.

<sup>67</sup> Kedar 2001, 89-91.

<sup>68</sup> „Oleum vero illud a Christiano religiose conservatur“ (Thomsen 2018, 526-527).

<sup>69</sup> Weltecke 2012, 80.

<sup>70</sup> Belting 2011, 16.

<sup>71</sup> Mit der Partizipation konnten sich leicht auch andere Absichten verbinden, so stellten lateinische Kreuzritter für syrische Klöster eine Gefahr dar, wie das Beispiel des Klosters des Mōr Baršaumō zeigt; Weltecke 2012, 87.

<sup>72</sup> Dagron 2007, 155-156.

<sup>73</sup> Eddé 2008, 469-470.

<sup>74</sup> Eddé 2008, 471, 675.

<sup>75</sup> So bei Thietmar, Laurent 1857, 16; in einem weiteren Manuskript des 13. Jahrhunderts (cod. II 1146, Brüssel): Devos 1947, 256; und bei Gautier de Coincy: Benoit 2007, 123-124; Raynaud 1882, 536-537. Die Legende wird auf Nūr ad-Dīn bezogen.

ad-Dins plausibel, sofern er nicht gar die Gesandten persönlich begleitete.

Vom Kloster zu erbringende Gegenleistungen für das Wohlwollen und den gewährten Schutz lassen sich nicht belegen, sind jedoch anzunehmen. Parallelen bestehen zu dem Kloster des Mör Baršaumō in der Nähe der heutigen Stadt Malatya (Türkei), ehemals Melitene. Dieses Kloster lag ebenso auf einem Berg und wurde im 11./12. Jahrhundert festungsartig ausgebaut. Wie Saidnaya beherbergte es eine wundertätige Reliquie (des Mör Baršaumō, der zwar schon 458 gestorben war, dessen Fingernägel aber weiterwuchsen) und zog auch die Muslime der Gegend an. Nachdem es 1177 unter die Oberhoheit des seldschukischen Sultans Qiliğ Arslans geraten war, forderte dieser Tributzahlungen, welche von offizieller christlicher Seite aus aber nicht erwähnt werden. „Der Sultan verstand seine Beziehung zum Kloster als hierarchisches Treueverhältnis, das mit einem Tribut bekräftigt wurde. Diese Tatsache konnte den syrisch-orthodoxen Patriarchen etwas beschämen, denn sie passte nicht zu dessen Programm der patriarchalen Unabhängigkeit von den weltlichen Mächten“<sup>76</sup>. Während Mönche von den Zuwendungen berichten, gibt der Patriarch Michael die Beziehung zum Sultan als Freundschaftsverhältnis wieder. Im Kloster des Mör Baršaumō waren die Mönche hingegen „nur durch die wundersam sich vermehrende Reliquie im Stande“, den Wunsch des Sultans nach Gebeten „ohne einen eigenen Verlust zu erfüllen“<sup>77</sup>.

Auch wenn nichts Konkretes darüber berichtet wird, ist ebenso für die Situation in Saidnaya anzunehmen, dass der reißende Absatz der Ampullen des heiligen Öls einen Teil zur Sicherheit des Klosters beitrug und die finanziellen Einnahmen mit dem herrscherlichen Interesse am Kloster korrelierten. Ölwunder sind in der schriftlichen Überlieferung des späten 12. Jahrhundert insgesamt sehr selten bezeugt<sup>78</sup>. Die Tatsache, dass sich gegen Ende des 12. Jahrhunderts auch in anderen Klöstern unter muslimischer Herrschaft die Produktivität bereits vorhandener Reliquien plötzlich enorm steigerte, erlaubt eine Annahme in Bezug auf den Zeitpunkt des Ölwunders und die Entwicklung der Massenwallfahrt. Die ausführliche Beschreibung der Verteilung des Öls bei Abū l-Makārim könnte als Hinweis gedeutet werden, dass es sich bei der Ölspendung nicht nur um ein ganz besonderes, sondern noch dazu um ein neuartiges und daher so erklärungswürdiges Phänomen handelt. Auffällig ist

auch das Interesse an dem Wunder im Sinaikloster, aus dem die früheste arabische Quelle über das Kloster Saidnaya stammt. Anfang des 13. Jahrhunderts wird dort von einem ähnlichen Ölwunder aus den Gebeinen der Hl. Katharina berichtet<sup>79</sup>.

Das plötzliche Einsetzen der Überlieferung, das erst ab 1186 dokumentierte Interesse der Templer an der außergewöhnlichen Reliquie und nicht zuletzt die Skepsis in Bezug auf die Quantität des aus der Chaghoura ausströmenden Öls sprechen eher für einen Beginn des Wunders – zumal in dieser Größenordnung – in der zweiten Hälfte des 12. Jahrhunderts anstatt schon im 11. Jahrhundert oder noch eher<sup>80</sup>. Dies schließt nicht aus, dass die Ikone vorher schon Objekt der Verehrung war und in der Vorstellung der Gläubigen Heilkraft besaß<sup>81</sup>. Schwitzwasser, feuchte Umgebung und schleimbildende Bakterien (*Pseudomonas*) bieten eine Erklärung für die Phänomene der Ölspende und der Inkarnation. Möglicherweise steht auch die dem Öl zugeschriebene Heilkraft mit bestimmten Organismen in Verbindung, da manche Pilze antibiotisch wirken. Die bei Abū l-Makārim genannten Ölmengen sind aber in keinem Fall auf natürliche Ursachen zurückzuführen, vielmehr ist in oder unter der auf dem Marmorbecken liegenden Ikone ein verborgenes System kommunizierender Gefäße zu vermuten. Abgesehen von der möglichen materiellen Notwendigkeit, die Einnahmen des Klosters durch Oblationen zu steigern, diente der Kult vermutlich der Selbstbehauptung des Klosters innerhalb des muslimischen Herrschaftsgebietes.

Neben dem Kloster waren die muslimischen Oberherren in verschiedenen Hinsichten Nutznießer des ‘Wunders’<sup>82</sup>. Das Kloster stellte nicht nur

<sup>76</sup> Weltecke 2012, 86.

<sup>77</sup> Weltecke 2012, 87.

<sup>78</sup> Ein weiteres Beispiel ist die ölspendende Reliquie des Demetrius in Thessaloniki; Ciggaar 2005.

<sup>79</sup> Das Ölwunder soll sich Ende des 11. Jahrhundert ereignet haben. Das erste Zeugnis des Ölkultes ist 1160/1161 belegt, als Philipp von Nablus Öl aus dem Sarg der Katharina erhielt; Jacoby 2006, 83; Thomsen 2018, 451–452.

<sup>80</sup> Vgl. Hamilton 2000, 209 Anm. 58.

<sup>81</sup> So steht es auch bei Gautier de Coincy; Benoit 2007, 121 (V. 385–418).

<sup>82</sup> Salah ad-Din führte die von Nūr ad-Dīn begonnene Förderung religiöser Einrichtungen weiter; Eddé 2008, 438–449. Die Annahme von Bernard Hamilton, dass der Schutz unter Saladin nicht fortbestand, stützt sich auf die Angabe bei Thietmar, dass die Zahlungen *usque ad tempus Coradini* fortgesetzt wurden, ist aber nicht sicher; Hamilton 2000, 210.



einen Ort der interreligiösen Begegnung dar. Aus der engen Verbindung des Klosters zu den Templern lässt sich annehmen, dass Saidnaya in politischer Hinsicht eine Mittlerfunktion zwischen Damaskus und den Kreuzfahrerherrschaften zukam. Denkbar ist, dass sich Geistlichen des Klosters für christliche Gefangene eingesetzt haben und ihnen gegebenenfalls Zuflucht gewährten<sup>83</sup>.

Die Möglichkeit, das Kloster überhaupt zu besuchen und als Wallfahrtsort außerhalb Syriens bekannt zu machen, bestand allem Anschein erst Ende des 12. Jahrhunderts unter der Herrschaft Salah ad-Dins, eventuell schon unter Nūr ad-Dīn. Erst nach der Einnahme Damaskus' durch Nūr ad-Dīn konnte die Region unter einer Oberherrschaft stabilisiert werden. Den Templern soll in Phasen des Waffenstillstands die Aufgabe

zugekommen sein, Pilgern nach Saidnaya Begleitschutz zu gewähren<sup>84</sup>. Wie viele westliche Pilger seit Ende des 12. Jahrhunderts überhaupt den Weg nach Saidnaya auf sich nahmen, bleibt dabei ungewiss. So deutet Thietmar in seiner 1217 verfassten *Peregrinatio* auf den von den Templern betriebenen Handel mit dem heiligen Öl hin<sup>85</sup>. Genauer schildert Roger von Wendover, dass die mit Öl gefüllten Ampullen nicht vom Kloster selbst, sondern von den Templern an Pilger vergeben (verkauft?) wurden: "In Zeiten der Waffenruhe mit den Ungläubigen (Heiden) bringen die Templer das Öl an ihre Wohnsitze, um es von dort aus an Pilger weiterzugeben, welche zum Beten angereist waren und welche in den verschiedensten Teilen der Welt die Verehrung der Gottesmutter noch steigern sollten"<sup>86</sup>. Diese Passage lässt vermuten, dass der Besuch des Klosters auch in dieser Zeit kontrolliert wurde. Laut Ibn Faḍlallāh al-'Umārī benötigten Besucher des Klosters dann unter mamlukischer Herrschaft Anfang des 14. Jahrhunderts die Erlaubnis des Sultans<sup>87</sup>.

In enger Verbindung mit den Templern steht schließlich auch die Propagierung des Kultes der Chaghoura in Lateineuropa und infolgedessen die Ausgestaltung der orientalischen Legenden<sup>88</sup>. So geht wohl auch der in lateinischen Texten explizite Bezug der Ölspende zu den Brüsten Marias auf lateineuropäische Vorstellungen zurück. Als Erweiterung des Motivs der *Maria lactans* begegnet das Motiv der brustweisenden Maria um die Mitte des 12. Jahrhundert in Erzählungen, in denen Maria ihre Milch nicht nur dem Jesusknaben vorbehält, sondern – wie in der *lactatio Bernardi* – Gläubige daran teilhaben lässt<sup>89</sup>. Hingegen besteht weder bei Burchard noch bei Abū l-Makārīm ein Bezug zwischen der Ölabsonderung und einem bestimmten Körperteil.

Aufgrund fehlender Zeugnisse bleibt vieles im Dunkeln und ist nicht belegbar, doch dürfte den muslimischen Herrschern, insbesondere wohl Nūr ad-Dīn und Salah ad-Dīn, in der Entwicklung und Ausgestaltung des Kultes der Chaghoura eine nicht unerhebliche Rolle zugekommen sein. In gewisser Weise waren sie die Katalysatoren in einem komplexen Zusammenspiel unterschiedlicher religiöser, gesellschaftlicher, politischer und wirtschaftlicher Interessengruppen und Faktoren, in dessen Verlauf das heilige Öl der Chaghoura europaweit zum begehrten Gut wurde. Mit dem Ende der Ayyubidenherrschaft 1250 ging die Bedeutung des

<sup>83</sup> Siehe Ciggaar 2005, 80-82.

<sup>84</sup> Vat. Lat. 44 73v.

<sup>85</sup> "Quem liquorem fratres templi ad domos suas deferunt, gracia orationum illuc venientes, quando cum paganis treugas habent" (Laurent 1857, 16).

<sup>86</sup> "Quem liquorem fratres Templi ad domos suas deferunt, cum inducias habent a paganis; ut peregrinis orationis gratia adventantibus inde distribuunt, qui honorem Dei genitricis in diversis mundi partibus reverenter attollant" (Roger of Wendover, Flores II; Hewlett 1887, 7; Eintrag zum Jahr 1204, die Chronik reicht bis 1231); so auch bei seinem Fortsetzer Matthaeus Parisiensis, Chronica (Luard 1874, 487).

<sup>87</sup> Abou Samra 2007, 665.

<sup>88</sup> Garosi 2015.

<sup>89</sup> Das Bildmotiv der stillenden oder brustweisenden Maria entstammt der koptischen Bildtradition, Darstellungen aus der Spätantike sind erhalten. Die Bildtradition der Isis lactans, in der die ägyptische Göttin Isis den Horusknaben stillt und ihrem Sohn mit der Muttermilch göttliche Kräfte überträgt, wird hier weitergeführt; Higgins 2012; Langener 1996. Allerdings scheint das Motiv im frühen Mittelalter eher selten gewesen zu sein. "Remarkably, the fascination with the theme's surmised Egyptian roots is inversely proportional to the modest quantity of finds, which range in date from the seventh century to the late tenth century. Until the 1990s, the Galaktotrophousa was only known from apse paintings behind the altar in the prayer rooms of cell complexes in the Monastery of St Jeremiah in Saqqara (three representations) and that of St Apollo in Bawit (two), and illustrations in Coptic manuscripts written between 892/93 and 989/90 (four)" (Immerzeel 2015, 97). "As her star rose in other parts of the Christian world, she simply vanished from Egyptian soil" (*idem* 2015, 101). Im lateinischen Westen sind bildliche Darstellungen später bezeugt, sie fanden erst seit dem späteren 13. Jahrhundert im Zusammenhang mit der Marienverehrung zunehmende Verbreitung, Marienlegenden mit Bezug zur Milch Mariens bzw. zum Motiv des Säugens sind vereinzelt schon eher belegt; Schreiner 2011; Marti/Mondini 1994.

Klosters und der Wallfahrt zurück<sup>90</sup>. Auch die enorme Produktivität der Chaghoura scheint in späteren Zeiten nachgelassen zu haben, zumindest findet die ungewöhnliche Quantität keine explizite Erwähnung mehr. Die Erwartungen westlicher Besucher werden mitunter eher enttäuscht. So identifiziert Wilhelm von Boldensele die heilige Flüssigkeit als profanes Olivenöl, welches unablässig in das Marmorbecken unter der Ikone tropft<sup>91</sup>. Bertrandon de la Brocquière sieht in der Vergabe des Öls nurmehr ein Mittel der Geldschneiderei<sup>92</sup>. Die Bedeutung Saidnayas als multireligiöser Kultort fand in den Berichten kaum mehr Beachtung, doch kamen bis in jüngst vergangene Tage Christen und Muslimen an diesen Ort und verehrten gemeinsam die Chaghoura.

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<sup>90</sup> Immerzeel 2009, 42; *idem* 2017, 235-236.

<sup>91</sup> "Haec tabula mediocris quantitate est supra vas quoddam marmoreum posita, intra murum cancellis ferreis praemunita. De ipsa visibiliter oleum quasi continue stillat, quod monachi recipientes de vase marmoreo, quod subter est, per cancellos immiso cochleari peregrinis distribuunt satis large. Per omnem modum videtur esse oleum olivae. Dicitur, quod pro certo aliquando de hac imagine oleum miraculose fluxerit; sed si hoc, quod modo fluit, divino fluat miraculo, rationabiliter dubito, et etiam multi alii de veritate hujus facti non immerito altercantur" (Grotefend 1852, 285).

<sup>92</sup> Schefer 1892, 65-66.

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## *The Divine Wisdom at the Church of Petra*

Diklah ZOHAR

### INTRODUCTION

At first glance, the mosaic decoration of the Church of Petra does not deviate much from the decorative programme of other sixth-century mosaics in the region. The *opus sectile* nave decoration is mostly lost, but the aisles show marvellous mosaics made according to the popular scheme of the time (Pl. 1), including wine-scrolls and geometric patterns that include various animals, inanimate objects and figurative depictions. Among these, however, are a few unique depictions of which the most exceptional, with hitherto no parallel on a church mosaic floor, is the depiction of Sophia, the Divine Wisdom. The personification is surrounded by a few other personifications, most of which have been adapted into Christian art from the Classical tradition. The unique grouping of these images together allows a new interpretation and a new insight in the ideas that guided the designer of the decorative programme. This article is dedicated to this unique ensemble.

### A SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE FLOOR<sup>1</sup>

The northern aisle shows a three-row vine medalion scroll, a type of composition that received the name 'peopled scrolls'<sup>2</sup>. The central line of medalions includes mostly various objects, and is serving as an axis for rich animal depictions and human figures in a symmetrical or antithetical stand. When human figures are depicted, they are engaged in various daily activities, labours or occupations, such as shepherds (Pl. 2) and merchants (Pl. 3), but also a unique depiction of two men balancing a camel that carries a long beam on its back (Pl. 4). It is possible that the beam is carried for building purposes and the scene would therefore refer to building activity<sup>3</sup>. The animals show a broad range of domesticated as well as wild beasts from roosters, gazelles and peacocks to elephants and wild donkeys.

The southern aisle shows a geometric carpet-design that creates a series of thirteen square emblems, decorated alternately by shell motifs (Pls 5-8). On each side of each emblem are, in an alternating order, a circle and an oblong, also decorated with a shell motif. All these side spaces bare figurative depictions. The oblong frames show various types of fish, the circles show bulls, birds, gazelles and wild donkeys. The central emblems (partly damaged) show, from east to west:

- A vessel with two birds standing on its rim and drinking from its water.
- A personification of the season of autumn identified by an inscription.
- An eagle depicted *en face* with outstretched wings.
- A personification of the season of summer identified by an inscription.
- A standing fisherman with a fish hanging from each hand.
- A personification of wisdom identified by an inscription.
- A bird-catcher.
- A personification of the season of spring identified by an inscription.
- A personification of the ocean identified by an inscription.
- A personification of the earth identified by an inscription.
- A sitting fisherman in a three-quarter view.
- A personification of the season of winter identified by an inscription.
- The last emblem is fragmentary, but seems to have depicted a fish.

<sup>1</sup> For an extensive description of the whole programme: Waliszewski 2001.

<sup>2</sup> The layouts applied in church-floors have been well-studied. See Kitzinger 1965; Dauphin 1978; Tal 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Zohar 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Waliszewski 2001, 250.

The most striking difference between the northern and the southern fields, apart from the layout, is the inclusion of a large number of personifications in the southern field and their absence in the northern field. The southern field includes, next to the personifications, also a broad range of fish, birds and other animals as well as depictions of human labours, but only the personifications carry inscriptions. Their iconography shows that they were all adapted from the Roman repertoire that had a long tradition in the East. A good example is the personification of the sea, Oceanos (Pl. 9).

Oceanos appears as a standing bearded man, wearing a draped cloth. His left leg rests on a dolphin, his raised right hand leans on a long oar and in his left he holds a sailing boat, its sail hangs from the mast and is full with the wind. Two lobster claws emerge like horns from his head. Oceanos as personification of sea is well known in Roman art and enjoyed in the East considerable popularity. He often appears as the male counterpart of *Tethys* or *Thalassa*, as can be seen more often in Antioch<sup>4</sup>. He is not to be confused with Poseidon, who has the trident and a *quadriga* carried by horses as his attributes, but can also appear with dolphins, oars, boats or war-ship rams<sup>5</sup>. Oceanos often appears as a bust or as a reclining river-god, and is usually identified by the lobster-claws on his head. The oar, dolphin and sailing boat are occasional attributes, and it is conspicuous that the artist of Petra chose to include all of them in his depiction. As such, the figure of Oceanos in Petra has no direct parallel.

The appearance of personifications in church mosaics and the Greco-Roman iconography that characterizes them is not exceptional. Byzantine art absorbed much of the Roman visual imagery that the viewers were familiar with. Some of these personifications became extremely popular in church (as well as synagogue) decoration of Late Antiquity and appear in various variations in the whole region. Next to the personification of the sea and as counterpart to it, appears the personification of earth. Henry Maguire considers earth and sea as

fundamental in understanding the universal message of church decoration. 'Earth' and 'sea' can be seen as complementary terms that represent the whole world, attesting a universal power to the divine<sup>6</sup>. Also the four seasons enjoyed popularity in the region<sup>7</sup>. However, in addition to these, the church of Petra includes a unique depiction of a personification that does not appear in any other church floor, namely the personification of Sophia, the Divine Wisdom.

#### TEXTUAL SOURCES AS AN INSPIRATION FOR CHURCH MOSAICS

The interpretation of church decoration is a complex issue. Maguire has treated a whole range of interpretation strategies, based on textual sources, either direct or allegorical. The most obvious ones are the cases in which the artistic decoration itself carries an inscription.

Though dedicatory inscriptions do appear regularly in churches, quotations from the Bible or other direct indicators for the meaning of the visual medium do not appear very often, and are limited in scope to a few words or a line. The most popular texts are verses from Psalms or the prophecy of Isaiah. One such example is the inscription: "And the lion will eat [straw] like the ox" (Isaiah 11:7)<sup>8</sup>. This quotation appears in more than one floor, but it is always the same verse. Psalms are quoted more often and in various churches different verses have been chosen: "Then they shall offer calves upon Your altar" (Psalm 51:21) appears in the Church of the Holy Martyrs Lot and Procopius in the village of Nebo, Jordan<sup>9</sup>. Often, we find a correlation between the chosen verse and the visual depiction that refer to it; the decoration at the Church of the Holy Martyrs Lot and Procopius echoes the text and depicts two antithetical bulls in front of a burning altar. Another quotation appears in the Propylaea Church at Gerasa in Jordan, with the text of Psalm 65:5b and, considerably longer, Psalm 86:1-3<sup>10</sup>. At times the inscription is rather a symbolic reference, like the Chi-Rho sign. A parallel that may be of importance for the Petra church is the depiction of an eagle with outstretched wings en face – a parallel to this depiction appears at the Church of Deacon Thomas, but here it includes the letters  $\alpha$  and  $\omega$ , the emblem of Christ. Michele Piccirillo interprets the eagle as a symbol of life and resurrection<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Waliszewski 2001, 250.

<sup>6</sup> Maguire 1987, 73-76.

<sup>7</sup> Waliszewski 2001, 251, 255, 257.

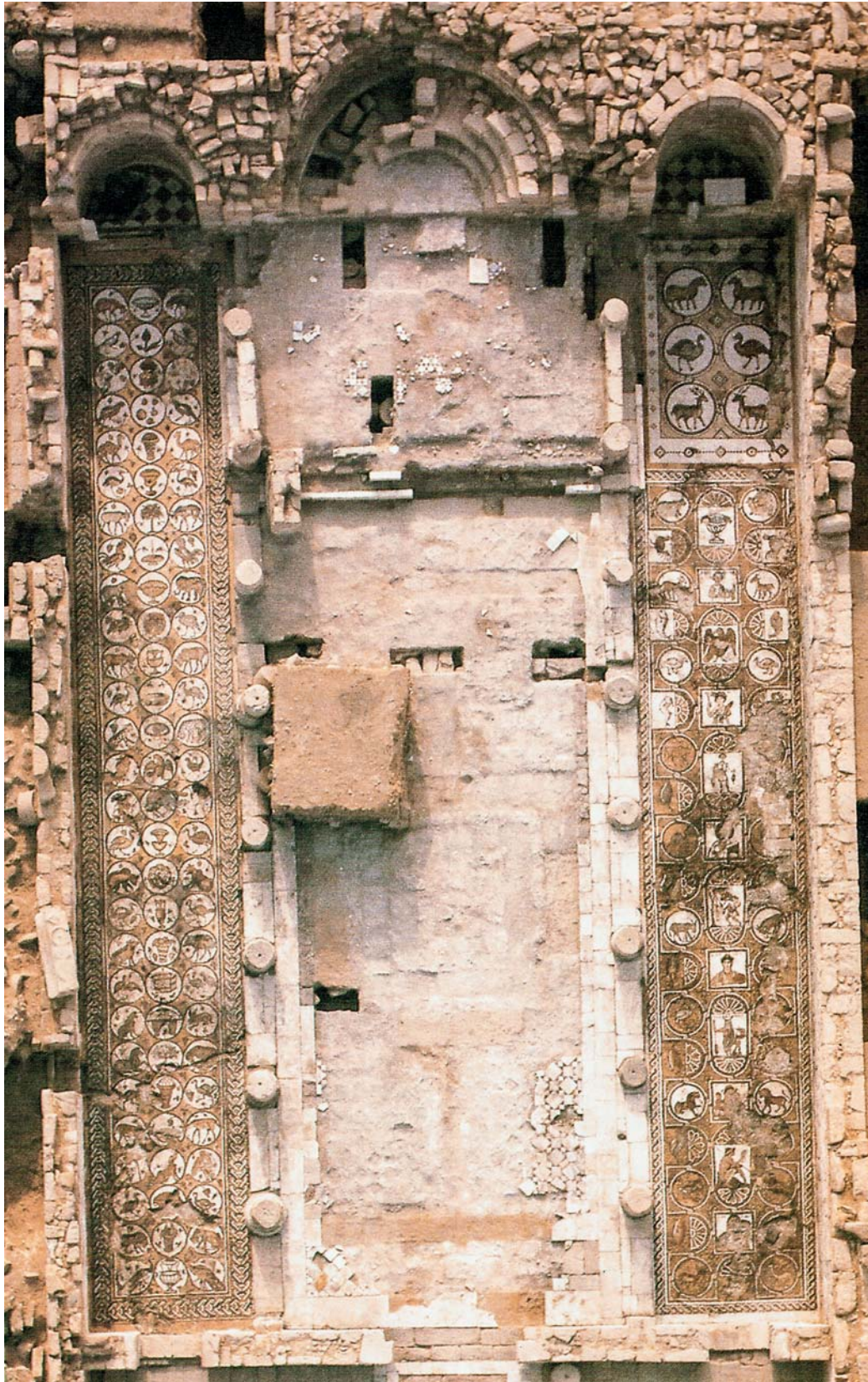
<sup>8</sup> Piccirillo 1997, Fig. 302.

<sup>9</sup> Piccirillo 1997, 165, Fig. 213.

<sup>10</sup> Piccirillo 1997, 297.

<sup>11</sup> Piccirillo 1997, 187, Fig. 259.





*Pl. 1. Ground view of the Petra Church (Waliszewski 2001, 306).*

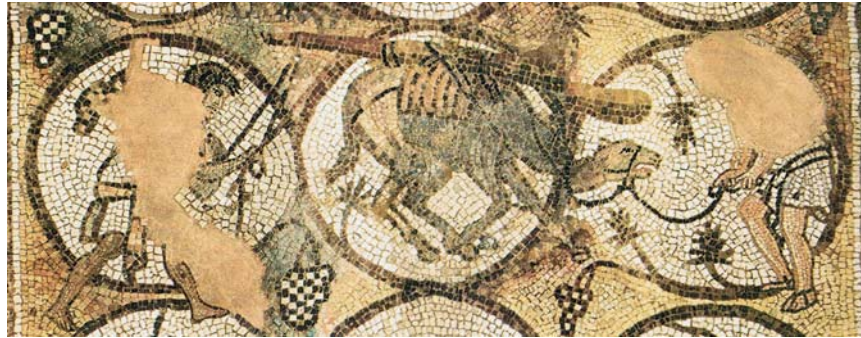




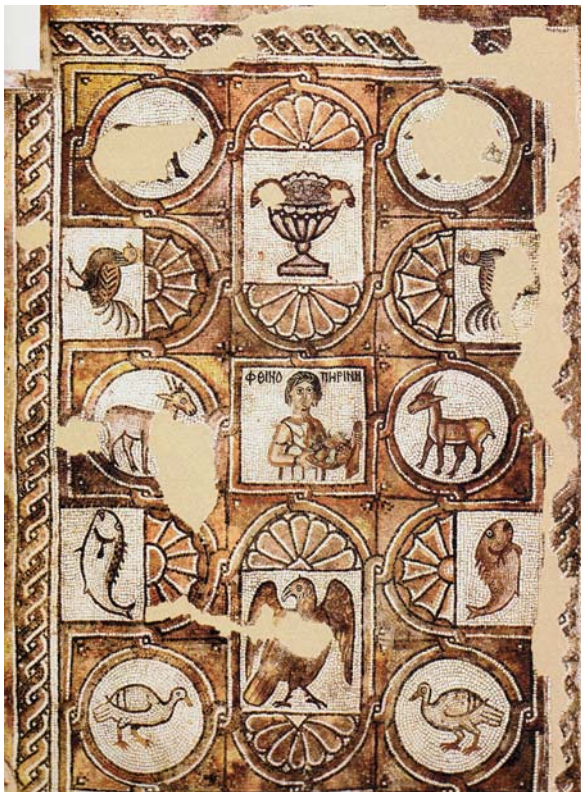
Pl. 2. Vine scroll with a standing shepherd (left), a drinking shepherd (right) and a shepherd dog (centre); northern aisle (Waliszewski 2001, 310 detail).



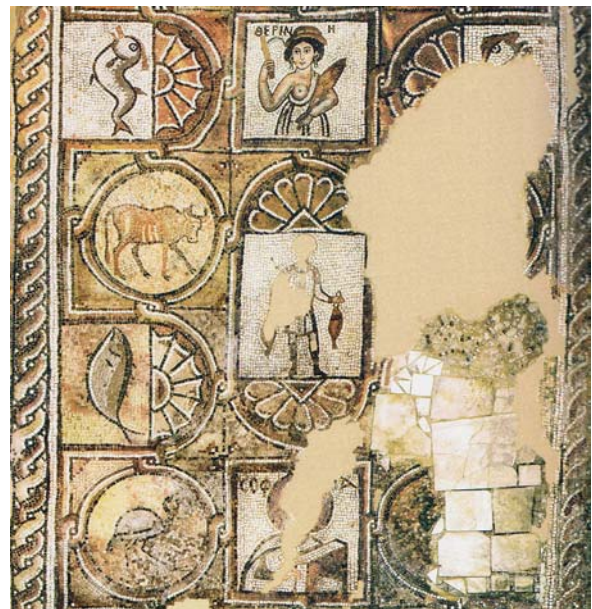
Pl. 3. Vine scroll with an African (left), a man in a Phrygian or Persian dress (right) and a display-chest (centre); northern aisle (Waliszewski 2001, 314 detail).



Pl. 4. A camel carrying a beam; northern aisle (Waliszewski 2001, 312 detail).

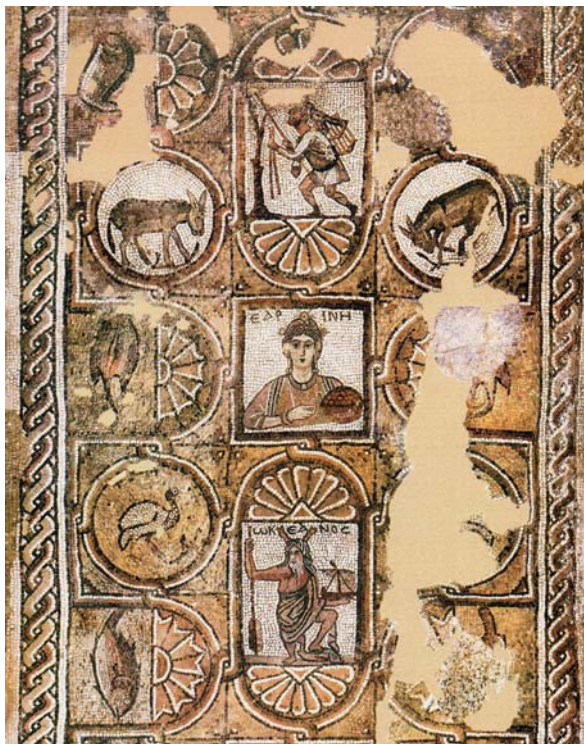


Pl. 5. Southern aisle; emblems 1-3 (Waliszewski 2001, 321).

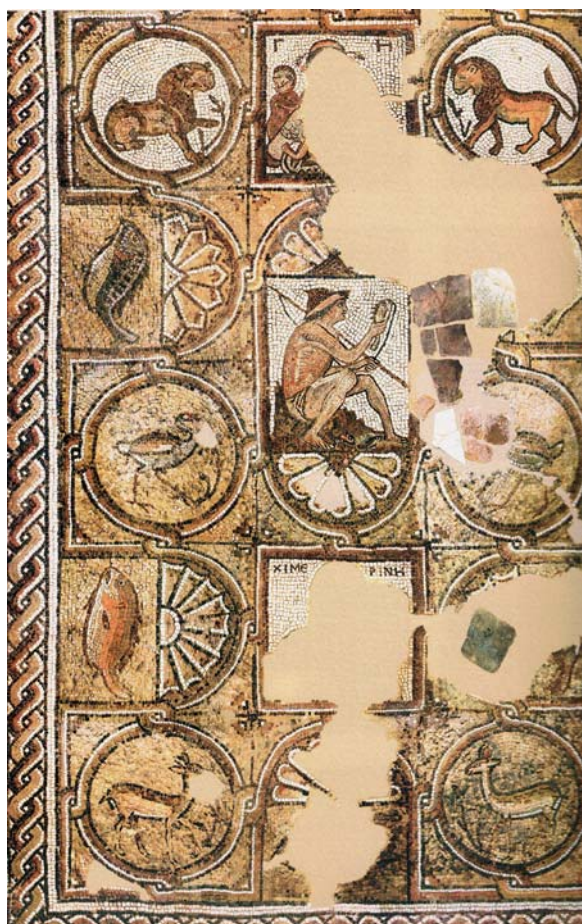


Pl. 6. Southern aisle; emblems 4-6 (Waliszewski 2001, 320).





*Pl. 7. Southern aisle; emblems 7-9  
(Waliszewski 2001, 319).*



*Pl. 8. Southern aisle; emblems 10-13  
(Waliszewski 2001, 318).*



*Pl. 9. Personification of Ocean; southern aisle  
(Waliszewski 2001, 323).*



It should be stressed that nowhere in the mosaic of Petra can we find a direct Biblical quotation. Although the designer of Petra included labels with the identification of the personifications (and thus was capable of writing – a specialisation that not all mosaic craftsmen mastered), he refrained from longer textual references. Even in the case of the eagle, a meaning can only be inferred by relating to parallels, such as the example from the Church of the Deacon Thomas. The absence of a quotation in Petra makes it difficult to trace the direct source of inspiration to the decorative program, but does not make the relation to Psalm necessary less likely. I suggest that the decoration of the Church of Petra was inspired by the book of Psalm and more specifically, Psalm 104. In the absence of a quotation, however, it is only the visual depiction that leads the viewer to this possible source. The main lead to Psalm 104 is the personification of Sophia in the southern aisle.

#### PSALM 104 AND THE DECORATIVE PROGRAMME OF THE PETRA CHURCH

The Psalm begins with a general praise for God and His creation and continues by describing the elements of nature as hastening to fulfil the divine will:

- <sup>5</sup> He set the earth on its foundations,  
so that it should never be moved.  
<sup>6</sup> You covered it with the deep as with a garment;  
the waters stood above the mountains.  
<sup>7</sup> At your rebuke they fled;  
at the sound of your thunder they took to flight.  
<sup>8</sup> The mountains rose, the valleys sank down  
to the place that you appointed for them.  
<sup>9</sup> You set a boundary that they may not pass,  
so that they might not again cover the earth.

The elements of land and sea, two personifications that appear in Petra one next to the other, appear in the Psalm very clearly as two fundamental elements that sustain all living creatures:

- <sup>10</sup> You make springs gush forth in the valleys;  
they flow between the hills;

- <sup>11</sup> they give drink to every beast of the field;  
the wild donkeys quench their thirst.  
<sup>12</sup> Beside them the birds of the heavens dwell;  
they sing among the branches.  
<sup>13</sup> From your lofty abode you water the mountains;  
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.  
<sup>14</sup> You cause the grass to grow for the livestock  
and plants for man to cultivate,  
that he may bring forth food from the earth  
<sup>15</sup> and wine to gladden the heart of man,  
oil to make his face shine  
and bread to strengthen man's heart.  
<sup>16</sup> The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly,  
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.  
<sup>17</sup> In them the birds build their nests;  
the stork has her home in the fir trees.  
<sup>18</sup> The high mountains are for the wild goats;  
the rocks are a refuge for the rock badgers.  
<sup>19</sup> He made the moon to mark the seasons;  
the sun knows its time for setting.  
<sup>20</sup> You make darkness, and it is night,  
when all the beasts of the forest creep about.  
<sup>21</sup> The young lions roar for their prey,  
seeking their food from God.  
<sup>22</sup> When the sun rises, they steal away  
and lie down in their dens.

The rich range of animals that appear in this text could undoubtedly inspire the rich animal imagery of the northern field. Some of the specific animals even appear clearly in the mosaic: the wild donkeys, lions, the wild goats and cattle. A cedar-tree appears at the eastern side<sup>12</sup> and various birds, water birds among them, appear symmetrically in the medallions. The four seasons are not named individually in the Psalm, but the moon and sun that mark the seasons was a sufficient reference to include this popular visual theme in the decorative program of the floor. In the mosaic, they do not appear together, but they are spread along the axis in a consecutive order from autumn to winter. But the ultimate association of the logos and divine wisdom is with the deed of creation. Psalm 104:24 states:

O Lord, how manifold are your works!  
In wisdom have you made them all;  
the earth is full of your creatures.

The clear textual reference to the divine wisdom demands special attention to this image in the mosaic.

<sup>12</sup> Waliszewski recognizes the fruit in the tree as cones (Waliszewski 2001, 237).

Sophia, the Divine Wisdom, is represented within an emblem as a bust-figure with aura, holding a codex in her left arm, making with her right hand the gesture of speech, that has become in Christian art the convention for blessing. The emblem is unfortunately damaged and, undoubtedly, a fierce discussion about the identity of this figure would have risen had it not been for the well-preserved Greek caption around her head that identifies her as Sophia.

In contrast to the other personifications on the floor, that may be taken to represent secular concepts of nature, Sophia has a clear Christian theological connotation. In Roman art she appears as part of the intellectual domain of study. Her sculpture at the Celsus library of Ephesos depicts her as a standing woman with rich draperies and holding a scroll. Next to her stood Arete (diligence), Ennoia (understanding) and Episteme (erudition)<sup>13</sup>. In Christianity Sophia is a theological concept that describes the logos, the second element of the trinity. The most famous church that was dedicated to the logos is the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, but other churches in the Byzantine territory were also dedicated to the second element of the trinity. The Church of Petra, however, was probably not one of them<sup>14</sup>.

References to theological concepts on church floors are extremely rare and we may therefore assume that the artist included this personification for a special reason and with a specific intention. That God is the source of all wisdom is also expressed in Proverb 2:6: "For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding". But taking a closer look at Psalm 104, the reader is not left in the conceptual sphere of allegory. The text specifies how the harmony in nature reflects this wisdom: how landscape is formed to be the perfect habitat for the animals, and how animals make use of the creation for their benefit. Humans make an inseparable part of this harmony and their labour, including the exploitation of creation, makes part of the divine plan. But where specific visual images come short, it is the ensemble of personifications that assists the designer in expression of conceptual ideas. Striking is the following part of the psalm, which refers to the labour of men:

<sup>23</sup> Man goes out to his work  
and to his labour until the evening.

<sup>24</sup> O Lord, how manifold are your works!

In wisdom have you made them all;  
the earth is full of your creatures.

<sup>25</sup> Here is the sea, great and wide,  
which teems with creatures innumerable,  
living things both small and great.

<sup>26</sup> There go the ships,  
and Leviathan, which you formed to play in it.

The mosaic includes several visual references to labour, both in the northern as in the southern aisle. The northern aisle includes shepherds, builders and merchants. The southern aisle includes a fisherman and a bird-catcher. Unlike other floors, no reference can be seen in Petra to land agriculture (as opposed to animal farming and other occupations that do appear in Petra). It is possible that this is a reflection of the limited agriculture in this desert area. In this perspective, the extensive reference to fishing and water is surprising, and may again not be a reflection of the arid area of Petra, but rather fulfil a symbolic intention. I argued elsewhere that the popularity of labour and depiction of occupations on church mosaic floors is an attempt to sanctify the daily and give also the very simple workers, whatever their occupation is, a place in the social hierarchy through the church<sup>15</sup>. The inclusion of such depictions in Petra suits this interpretation, but it seems that an additional function is attached to them. The place of humanity as exploiting creation is given a clear positive place within the larger universal order, and the visual program is designed to reflect the harmony of creation that the text stresses. Most interesting is the reference to the sea in the Psalm as the domain of ships and the depiction of the ship in relation to the personification of Oceanos. While the description of land in the Psalm refers especially to the multitude of creatures and animals (and the visual medium reflects this aspects nicely), the sea plays next to its function as the habitat of a multitude of creatures, an additional role in the human exploitation of nature; the ships and boats that go to and

<sup>13</sup> Stroocka 2003, 41.

<sup>14</sup> One of the important finds in the church were burnt papyri which text has partly been recovered. These reveal that the church was probably dedicated to the: "Blessed and All-Holy Lady, the most Glorious Mother of God and ever-Virgin Mary" (Bikai 2001, Preface VII).

<sup>15</sup> Zohar 2017.

fro received in the visual medium their place as the sailing ship as one of the attributes of Oceanos. Even Leviathan of the Psalm, an unspecific sea-creature, tamed and vanquished by God in other Psalms<sup>16</sup>, was included in the depiction as suppressed under the foot of Oceanos, with Psalm 104 transforming it into a playing-creature for God's entertainment. The exceptional amount of fish, sea creatures and water symbolism in the southern aisle is conspicuous and might reflect the lengthy treatment that it received by the Psalm.

#### OTHER LABOURS

Despite the absence of agricultural work from the visual imagery, Psalm 104 does refer to agricultural work and mentions three products: wine for drinking, oil as ointment and bread for consumption.

Wine is praised specifically for its alcoholic effect; not drunkenness but as it "gladdens human heart". It would be quite unusual for a church-mosaic to depict a drunken man on its floor, but in this respect it is interesting to mention the depiction of the drinking shepherd. Although he can be described as a shepherd quenches his thirst, this depiction is highly unusual and in fact unique among church mosaics. Church art has two iconographical types for the depiction of shepherds: the main type is a standing shepherd who leans against his staff with legs crossed and one arm resting on his head (this type appears also in the northern aisle in Petra). Another type is the shepherd seated on a rock, keeping a watchful eye on his flock. The depiction in Petra is most unusual, as we know no parallel for a drinking figure on a church mosaic. His identity as a shepherd is convincing because of the symmetry of the depiction and his close relation to the other shepherds and their accompanying shepherd dog (Pl. 2), but the iconography itself is unique. Furthermore, the depiction of the amphora on the mosaic is so accurate, that Tomasz Waliszewski identified it as amphora of the Gaza type 4, which was used for the transportation of wine<sup>17</sup>. It could be, that the shepherd in our depiction quenches his thirst...with wine. His body-position, with limbs clung and the lips craving for the

amphora, may also suggest some measure of drunkenness.

Two other figures in the Petra mosaic that are exceptional are the two foreign merchants (Pl. 3). Elsewhere in churches we do come regularly across people of foreign origin, especially Africans and Phrygians. They are usually depicted in relation to a rare commodity: exotic animals, such as giraffes, zebras, ostriches and African elephants. The Petra mosaic depicts such animals, too, but not in relation to the merchants. The two men appear to have some kind of portable device that looks like a hexagonal chest on foot that appears in the central medallion on which they display their merchandise. It is difficult to tell what these objects are. To the right is a figure dressed in Persian dress with tight trousers, holding a flat bowl with arms stretched out. To the left is an African, who holds up a jug. Petra has long been an important merchant-city along the spice-route. Especially incense, myrrh, perfumes and spices were transported through the desert route to reach the Mediterranean ports. The importance of Petra as a merchant city degraded already in the Roman period, but it is not impossible that such products continued to have a local appeal. If the jug in the hands of the merchant contains an aromatic oil it may refer to the 'oil that makes their faces shine' in the Psalm.

The Psalm concludes with the dependence of all living things in the divine will:

<sup>27</sup> These all look to you,

to give them their food in due season.

<sup>28</sup> When you give it to them, they gather it up;  
when you open your hand, they are filled with  
good things.

<sup>29</sup> When you hide your face, they are dismayed;  
when you take away their breath, they die  
and return to their dust.

<sup>30</sup> When you send forth your Spirit, they are created,  
and you renew the face of the ground.

Psalm 104 ends with praise for the Lord and the perpetual order of his creation.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Despite the application of familiar lay-out and traditional themes, the Petra mosaic shows many unusual and even unique iconographic types, that do not appear in any other mosaic floor in the

<sup>16</sup> Psalm 74:13 and elsewhere: Isaiah 27:1 and Job 40:25.

<sup>17</sup> Waliszewski 2001, 225-226.



region. These unique features, though marked in the past, did not receive much attention. Especially exceptional is the grouping of so many personifications in one field and the appearance of the theological concept of the Divine Wisdom. It is also this specific inclusion that suggests that the interpretation of the floor should be sought in the sphere of the creation. Though the richness of animal-depiction in church-mosaics already led to the idea that the program should be connected to the wonder of creation, in no other example the relation between the decorative program and a specific psalm is so explicit as in Petra. Since the Book of Psalms is the most quoted book on mosaic floors, we may assume a general familiarity with those texts that had special appeal as a source of inspirations for designers also in those cases where it has been chosen not to quote the text directly on the floor. Therefore, since a direct quotation of the Biblical text is missing, the relation between the visual imagery and the text of Psalm 104 becomes explicit only by a comparative study of text and image, but this comparison indicates Psalm 104 as a plausible inspiration sources for the design of the Petra mosaic. At the same time, there are elements mentioned in the Psalm that did not receive a visual expression, most notably the consumption of bread (such imagery does exist also in other mosaic floors in Jordan).

Though the floor does not include all the animals and aspects that are mentioned in the Psalm, those details that the designer did choose to visualise, such as the drinking man, the merchant with the oil-flask, the unique iconography of Oceanos with the ship with a full-blown sail and the vanquished

Leviathan under his foot, and especially the personification of Divine Wisdom, suggest that Psalm 104 may have been either one of the direct inspiration sources for the artistic programme of the Petra Church floor or that the mosaic expresses very similar ideas, though refraining from a direct textual reference.

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## Book Review

Ge Chengyong, 景教遗珍: 洛阳新出唐代景教经幢研究 (Jingjiao yizhen : Luoyang xinchu Tang dai Jingjiao jingdong yanjiu) *Studies on the Nestorian stone pillar of the Tang dynasty recently recovered in Luoyang*. Beijing: Wenwu 2009. xvi+182 pp.

By far the most widely known source for the presence of Eastern ('Nestorian') Christianity in China is the inscription on a large limestone stele in Xi'an. The inscription, in Chinese with some personal names in Syriac, was erected on the 7th of January 781 in or near the Tang imperial capital Chang'an (present-day Xi'an). It describes how in 635 a small group of Christian missionaries arrived in China from the 'Roman Empire' (*Daqin* in Chinese; in a Tang context this can also have the adjectival meanings 'Byzantine' or 'Christian'). These men received permission to translate their sacred books and to settle and spread their religion within China. The text also gives a brief description of the teachings of the 'Illustrious (or luminous) religion' (*Jingjiao*).

The stele was removed and buried in 845 at a time when Buddhism and other 'non-Chinese' religions were suppressed in the so-called Huichang Persecution and it was rediscovered during construction work near the Chongren temple outside Xi'an sometime between 1623 and 1625. The discovery was reported and the monument was almost immediately recognized as Christian in nature. Jesuit missionaries quickly made the inscription known in Europe where translations in various European languages appeared in the 1630's. Athanasius Kircher published the Chinese text (characters and a Romanisation) together with a Latin translation in his *China Illustrata* in 1667<sup>1</sup>. Interest in the monument and its text remained and towards the end of the nineteenth century attempts were made to remove the stele from China. To this the Chinese authorities reacted by moving the stele from behind the Buddhist Chongren Temple in Longquan, where it had been re-erected, to the famous 'Forest of Steles' (*Beilin*, now Beilin Museum), also in Xi'an. Since 2003 the monument is on the official 'list of Chinese cultural relics forbidden to be exhibited abroad'<sup>2</sup>.

Apart from this long inscription numerous Christian grave-stones are known from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, from Quanzhou (*Zaiton* to early traders) on the mainland coast of the Taiwan Strait and also from Mongolia (in its wider, cultural sense). Two more, but later stelae from 960 and 1365 remain at the site of the former Monastery of the Cross (*Shizi si*) in the Fangshan District in south-western Beijing. All these inscriptions are considerably shorter than the

one on the Xi'an stele. Apart from this epigraphic material, manuscript sources for early Christianity in China have been found along the Silk Road, especially in the famous 'library' in Dunhuang<sup>3</sup>. These manuscripts include Christian teachings,

<sup>1</sup> A. Kircheri, E. Soc. Jesu, *China monumentis, qua sacris qua profanis, nec non variis naturae & artis spectaculis, aliarumque rerum memorabilium argumentis illustrata* (Amsterdam: Jacob van Meurs 1667) Fol. 1-45 (Pars Prima. Monumenti Syro-Sinici interpretatio).

<sup>2</sup> Relevant publications are: H. Havret sj, *La stèle chrétienne de Si Ngan-fou*. Vol. 1-3 (Chang-Hai: Imprimerie de la Mission Catholique 1895, 1897, 1902); (Peter) Y. Saeki, *The Nestorian monument in China* (London: SPCK 1916, reprinted 1928); *idem*, *Nestorian Documents and Relics in China* (Tokyo: Toho bunkwa gakuin / The Academy of oriental culture 1937; 2nd edition, Tokyo: Maruzen 1951); and ultimately the posthumously published work by P. Pelliot, *L'inscription nestorienne de Si-ngan-fou*, Edited with supplements by A. Forte (Kyoto: Scuola di Studi Asia Orientale / Paris: Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises Collège de France 1996). See also M. Keevak, *The Story of a Stele. China's Nestorian Monument and Its Reception in the West, 1625-1916* (Hong Kong University Press 2008). More in general: A.C. Moule, *Christians in China before the year 1550* (London: SPCK 1930); S.H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia. Volume I: Beginnings to 1500* (New York: Orbis 1998); and P. Riboud, 'Tang', in: N. Standaert (ed.), *Handbook of Christianity in China. Volume One: 635-1800*. Handbuch der Orientalistik IV.15 (Leiden: Brill 2000) 1-42. (See also: [www.syriacstudies.com/AFSS/Syriac\\_Articles\\_in\\_English/Entries/2010/10/25\\_Description\\_and\\_Significance\\_of\\_the\\_Nestorian\\_Stele,\\_A\\_Monument\\_Commemorating\\_the\\_Propagation\\_of\\_the\\_Da\\_Qin\\_Luminous\\_Religion\\_in\\_the\\_Middle\\_Kingdom\\_\(da\\_qin\\_jing\\_jiao\\_liu\\_xing\\_zhong\\_guo\\_bei\).html](http://www.syriacstudies.com/AFSS/Syriac_Articles_in_English/Entries/2010/10/25_Description_and_Significance_of_the_Nestorian_Stele,_A_Monument_Commemorating_the_Propagation_of_the_Da_Qin_Luminous_Religion_in_the_Middle_Kingdom_(da_qin_jing_jiao_liu_xing_zhong_guo_bei).html)).

<sup>3</sup> A brief overview in e.g. S.H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity I*, 305-309 (with a list in note 68 on pp. 320-321); and M. Nicolini-Zani, 'Christian monastic literature in China. Preliminary survey and bibliography', in: R. Malek and G. Criveller (eds), *Light a Candle. Encounters and Friendship with China. Festschrift in Honour of Angelo S. Lazarotto P.I.M.E.* (Sankt Augustin 2010) 297-326 (pp. 300-304). See also H. Takahashi, 'Transcription of Syriac in Chinese and Chinese in Syriac script in the Tang period', in: J. Den Heijer, A. Schmidt, T. Pataridze (eds), *Scripts Beyond Borders. A Survey of Allographic Traditions in the Euro-Mediterranean World* (Louvain: Peeters 2014) 329-349.

hymns and components of the Church's liturgy. The interpretation of all this material, both epigraphic and in manuscript, is still an ongoing process with lots of pitfalls. An important problem is the interpretation of the terminology used in these texts, which is often borrowed from – or at least leaning onto – Buddhist terminology. In other instances Syriac names or words are given in a Chinese transcription (hence in characters) which is not always clear. In such instances it is important to know both the pronunciation of the Syriac original or one of several possible intermediary languages from Central-Asia and the sounds of Tang Chinese (Middle Chinese).

In May 2006 a previously unknown and relatively long inscription was added to this corpus. Its bearer is the large fragment of a broken pillar with eight inscribed faces in the style of Buddhist *dhārāni sūtra* pillar discovered in Luoyang in Central China. The monument was presented to the wider world in 2009 in a volume edited by Professor Ge Chengyong, editor-in-chief of the Chinese Cultural Relics Press, and containing both black-and-white and colour photographs, a map, and a good, legible reproduction of rubbings of the monument. The text of this publication which is reviewed here is in Chinese with summaries in English. Most of these summaries are very brief and unfortunately the English in many instances is far from flawless and in cases really hard to understand without a knowledge of Chinese as well (my own ability to read Chinese is limited)<sup>4</sup>. In fact this publication is a collection of articles published in China between 2006 and 2009, combined with the most welcome and already mentioned photographs and a good reproduction of the inscription<sup>5</sup>.

The pillar measures about 40 cm in diameter and the eight faces vary in width from 14 to 16 cm. The height of the remaining part is 60 to 85 cm (due to the slanting fracture). The top panels of six of the eight faces of the pillar are decorated. On two opposing faces there are square panels with a so-called Nestorian cross in each one. One cross is more slender

and has gems or floral figures in the centre and in the arms of the cross, the other cross is plain. Both crosses rest on a lotus flower and are flanked by volutes which may be part of the lotus-motive. The plain cross is flanked on the adjacent panels by *apsaras* flying with fluttering ribbons above clouds, possibly representing angels. The panels flanking the more slender cross likewise show mythical figures flying towards the cross. These figures are more difficult to identify from the rubbings, but may represent *apsaras* as well. Nicolini-Zani takes the former “as crowned male *apsaras*” and the latter “as female *apsaras* who offer respectively a precious pearl and a lotus flower to the cross”<sup>6</sup>. This combination of the Christian cross with flying *apsaras* is not known from other iconographic sources in Asia, whereas the cross resting on a lotus-shaped base is not uncommon.

It is the slender, decorated cross which tops the face of the pillar on which the main text of the inscription begins. Of the two remaining top panels one is blank and the other contains a brief note: “A great event took place on the sixteenth day of the second moon of the third year of *Dahe*, the year of *Renyan* [25 March 829], when the coffin was moved to another place.” In fact, as we will see below, this note refers only to a removal of the monument and the tomb it belonged to. Both the tomb and the pillar with its inscription had been founded fourteen years earlier.

Several problems surround this monument. One is that the pillar was found “at a curio market of Luoyang city” where it was confiscated by the police and handed over to ‘the Second Archaeology Team of Luoyang City’. The English summary of the brief report of this discovery (pp. 165-171) is less than half a page long and is confusing for several reasons. To begin with, the archaeologists state that the monument was found on the market in July 2006, whereas several other statements in the volume under review give May 2006 as the time of the discovery. More important is the fact that this object lacks a proper archaeological context and the fact that it was found on the antiques market, where the possibility of it being a forgery is real. Other reports state that the pillar was found in an antiques shop in Luoyang, or even in Shanghai and at present it is impossible to know which of these versions is correct<sup>7</sup>.

Following its discovery, the Luoyang archaeologists tried to trace the pillar back to its origin. This led to the conclusion that “the stele should be unearthed in 1970s, when villagers of Qi, Town Lilou, District Luolong of Luoyang City was drilling [a] well”. It is further stated that the pillar was stolen from Qi settlement (*Qicun*) “a few years ago”. This is strangely at odds with the majority of statements both within the book under review and elsewhere that the pillar was unearthed in May 2006. The site referred to is a level piece of land about one kilometre south of the remains of the Jianchun Gate of the walled Sui and Tang city of Luoyang. In the same area archaeologists found ten tombs from the same period<sup>8</sup>.

According to the report by the archaeologists information about the actual finding of the pillar in the (late) 1970s was gathered from interviews with a few men, all in their sixties and offering different dates for the actual discovery. This makes it likely that the pillar was indeed found by villagers while drilling a well and that it had remained in the village Qi for nearly thirty years before thieves brought it on the market. Accepting

<sup>4</sup> The discovery is mentioned and discussed in several other publications, both in Chinese and in other languages (mainly English). Detailed and well informed is M. Nicolini-Zani, ‘The Tang Christian pillar from Luoyang and its Jingjiao inscription. A preliminary study’, *Monumenta Serica. Journal of Oriental Studies* 57 (2009) 99-140. Recent, but in Japanese with only a brief summary in English, is M. Yataka, ‘中国洛陽新出景教経幢の紹介と史料的价值 An introduction to the Luoyang Nestorian Stone Pillar and their [sic] value as historical resources’, *東アジア文化交渉研究 [Journal of East Asian Cultural Interaction Studies]* 5 (2012) 351-357.

<sup>5</sup> Nicolini-Zani, ‘The Tang Christian pillar’, 100-102, offers a survey of the Chinese publications between 2006 and 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Nicolini-Zani, ‘The Tang Christian pillar’, 106.

<sup>7</sup> A fairly clear but inconclusive summary of the facts in Nicolini-Zani, ‘The Tang Christian pillar’, 102-104.

<sup>8</sup> Zhang Naizhu, ‘The Luoyang Nestorian pillar and the Gande township: A settlement of foreigners in the Luoyang area during the Tang dynasty’, in: L. Tang, D.W. Winkler (eds), *From the Oxus River to the Chinese Shores* (Münster: LIT Verlag 2013) 177-202 (p. 181).



this piece of oral history, it seems unlikely that the monument was forged purposely for the antiques market. Nonetheless, a more consistent provenance of the object would be most welcome.

The text on the monument is not without problems either, partly of course due to the fact that the pillar is broken and the lower part is missing. After a traditional opening invocation on the first text panel (“We implore: pure God, pure Great Majesty, pure...”) the main body of the inscription contains two texts stretching over nineteen and twenty-one columns each. A fourth part is the dating formula on the top panel already mentioned.

The first part of the text on the pillar was already known in part. It is *Da Qin jingjiao xuanyuan zhiben jing* (大秦景教宣元至本經 ‘Book of the Luminous religion from *Daqin* on the Disclosing of the Origin’). This ‘book’ or canonical text – the word *jing* (經) can here also be translated as *sutra* – is referred to in another Christian text from the Tang dynasty discovered in Dunhuang by Paul Pelliot in 1908 (Ms P. 3847) and it survives in part in another Dunhuang manuscript that once belonged to Li Shengduo (李盛鐸; 1858-1937), a Beijing official from the Ministry of Education and a scholar<sup>9</sup>. Li Shengduo is known to have stolen Dunhuang manuscripts from the Imperial Library in Beijing. Recently he has also been accused of forging such manuscripts, but this accusation cannot be substantiated (it is clear at least that he did not forge manuscripts himself). Two Christian manuscripts from Dunhuang were purchased from the Li Shengduo collection by Kojima Yasuhiro and thus found their way to Japan<sup>10</sup>. The manuscript with the text *Da Qin jingjiao xuanyuan (zhi)ben jing* here became known as ‘Kojima manuscript B’ and as part of a private collection this was unavailable for research for a long period. The text was printed by Saeki in his *Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*. At present the manuscript is kept in the Kyōto Shōoku in Osaka (Tonkō-Hikyū Collection, manuscript no. 431)<sup>11</sup>. A reconstruction of this text based on both the Luoyang inscription and the Dunhuang manuscript, together with a translation, is provided by Nicolini-Zani<sup>12</sup>. It contains the basic teachings of Christianity, but the text is still incomplete as we have it.

The second part of the inscription begins with the second column on face five of the monument and records the circumstances of (or reasons for) the erection of the pillar. Since this text has no direct parallels, is incomplete and contains a number of names and titles it is much more difficult to understand than the first part of the inscription<sup>13</sup>. It is in this passage that the dating formula for the monument occurs.

Although the first part of the text inscribed on the pillar appears to be fully Christian, both the appearance of the monument (a *dhārāni* pillar), the opening invocation on the first text panel (“We implore: ...”) and this second part of the text place it fully within the Chinese-Buddhist tradition of its time. Originally the pillar was erected near a tomb made on a plot of land purchased on 22 January 815. Its aim was to propagate the ‘Luminous Sun’ bringing light in the darkness<sup>14</sup>. Just like ‘normal’ *dhārāni* pillars propagate Buddhist sutras or incantation.

Fourteen years later, in 829, both the tomb and the pillar were solemnly moved to another place, as stated on the

inscribed top panel of the pillar. In the interpretation offered by Nicolini-Zani two persons were buried in the tomb: an army commander and his wife<sup>15</sup>. Obviously, the monument was erected by their son. Other members of the family clan are mentioned, amongst them ‘the younger brother’, the Christian monk *Qingsu*. The members of this family carry the Chinese surname *An* (安) which was the name given to Sogdians originating from Bukhara<sup>16</sup>. Members of the clergy of the *Daqin* (Christian) monastery in Luoyang carry the family name *Mi* (米) and *Kang* (康) referring to origins in Māymurgh (the surroundings of Panjikent) and Samarkand respectively. All these individuals are Sogdians<sup>17</sup>.

For those who do not or not easily read Chinese at least the importance of the volume edited by Ge Chengyong lies first and foremost in the pictures of the monument and in the high quality reproduction of the rubbings of the inscription and the decoration on the pillar. The only article in the volume which comes with a full translation in English (by Pietro De Laurentis) is by Zhang Naizhu, ‘Note on a Nestorian Stone inscription from the Tang Dynasty Recently Unearthed in Luoyang’ (originally published in 2007). Zhang is a member

<sup>9</sup> See X. Rong, *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*, Asian Studies 5 (Leiden: Brill 2013) 232-233, 501-517 (= Lecture 18. Forgeries and the Authentication of Dunhuang Manuscripts).

<sup>10</sup> Rong, *Eighteen Lectures*, 335-336.

<sup>11</sup> *Shōoku* means ‘library’. Kyōto Shōoku is basically a large collection of Japanese and Chinese medical and pharmaceutical books and manuals on herbal medicine assembled by the Takeda, founders of Takeda Pharmaceutical Company Ltd. The collection was donated to the Takeda Science Foundation and is open to the public within the premises of the Takeda factory in Osaka (cf. H. Funabashi, *Timeless Ventures. 32 Japanese companies that imbibed 8 principles of longevity* (New Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill 2009) 11).

<sup>12</sup> Nicolini-Zani, ‘The Tang Christian pillar’, 129-134 (Appendix).

<sup>13</sup> For an interpretation with a partial paraphrase in English: Nicolini-Zani, ‘The Tang Christian pillar’, 116-127.

<sup>14</sup> Nicolini-Zani, ‘The Tang Christian pillar’, 117, suggesting that the ‘Luminous Sun’ is an image of Christ.

<sup>15</sup> Nicolini-Zani, ‘The Tang Christian pillar’, 118.

<sup>16</sup> For the habit to give specific Chinese surnames to foreigners of specific ethnic backgrounds, and to Sogdians in particular, see Y. Yoshida, ‘Personal Names, Sogdian I. In Chinese sources’ in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* ([www.iranicaonline.org/articles/personal-names-sogdian-1-in-chinese-sources](http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/personal-names-sogdian-1-in-chinese-sources)).

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of the Luoyang monument in this light see B. Ashurov, *Tarsākya: an analysis of Sogdian Christianity based on Archaeological, Numismatic, Epigraphic and Textual Sources*. Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in the Study of Religions, Department of the Study of Religions, SOAS, University of London 2013 (<http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/18057>). The thesis contains an extensive bibliography. Recent about Sogdian Christianity is also N. Sims-Williams, M. Schwartz, W. J. Pittard (eds), *Biblical and other Christian Sogdian texts from the Turfan collection*. Berliner Turfantexte 32 (Turnhout: Brepols 2014).

of the Luoyang Longmen Caves Research Institute and was in 2006 the first to make the discovery of the Nestorian pillar public. In the volume by Ge Chenyong, Zhang and De Laurentis present a transcription of the Chinese text on the monument together with a first translation in English. This has now been superseded by the article by Matteo Nicolini-Zani<sup>18</sup>.

More important in this article is the contextual description of the *dhārāṇi sūtra* pillar and the way in which the use of such inscribed pillars was adopted by Christians and Daoists alike, while in some instances also clearly referring to traditional Confucian ideas about filial piety<sup>19</sup>. During the decades around AD 800 Luoyang must have been a cultural melting pot and amongst many other groups the city was home to a Christian community (of Sogdian origin) which freely borrowed from the traditions of its Chinese and other Central-Asian neighbours.

Within the city existed a Christian monastery subsequently known as 'Persian' and 'Roman' (*Daqin*) monastery, and we know there was a Manichaean monastery as well.

Because the volume consists of a collection of previously published articles there is quite some overlap in content, with more editions of the inscription and even a second translation into English by Li Tang. The brevity of the English summaries often makes it difficult to access their contents. However important and welcome this volume is, it is certainly not the definitive publication of the precious monument, not in Chinese and certainly not in English. In combination with the clear and balanced article by Nicolini-Zani it is, as it stands, the best available.

Lauran Toorians

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<sup>18</sup> See note 3 above.

<sup>19</sup> In the printed text the title *Uṣṇīṣa Vijaya Dhārāṇī {sūtra}* comes out in all instances as U□□□a-vijaya-dhārāṇī.